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SCMW08

6107

from the desk of...

MY ETERNAL IMAGE of Freddie Blassie is not one of a loud-speaking and loudly dressed manager. It's not even of a particular match he might have had against any one of more than a dozen fellow Hall of Famers. The image I retain is of one instant in a just about all his matches when he morphed from being merely an evil man into a vampire.

That moment didn't come without warning. His eyes foreshadowed what was to come. They'd get big and hungry and mean. As a fan, I could see it from the upper reaches of Madison Square Garden or through the 19-inch black and white Panasonic my parents put in my bedroom to keep my wrestling habit away from the household's general population.

If I knew what was about to happen—and I'd get a little queasy in the stomach—imagine how Blassie's opponents must have felt.

"You knew what was coming," said former WWWF World champion Pedro Morales, "but it's not something you could prepare yourself for."

Morales says he still has nightmares about certain opponents during his nearly 30-year career, but "they are never as bad as the actual experience of wrestling Blassie."

"The bite," Morales said in a whisper, his face scrunching at the painful memory. "That awful bite."

The image is still vivid to me more than 30 years later. It started with that crazed look. Then he'd grab his victim by the face and he'd bare his weapons of flesh destruction. In an instant, the teeth would be gnawing into flesh, usually about three inches above the eye level. As maniacal as he seemed to have become, he was always cognizant of the referee's count. He'd break an instant before disqualification and then re-insert those fangs precisely into the hole he had started, and wait for a fresh count. He'd keep this up as long as it took to remove a clump of skin large enough so that when he spit it out on the mat, he could elicit a collective gag from all in attendance. *(Share the feeling; see photo on page 35.)*

As ghastly an experience as it was for the fans, it was almost surreal to the opponent. He'd make sure that when he spit out the hunk of flesh, it would be so the opponent could see it, "at least with me," Morales recalled. "Aside from the blood loss, and the flow into your eyes, you had to deal with the trauma of seeing your face being mutilated that way."

Fortunately for Morales, he defended the title against a Blassie who in the early-'70s was at the tail end of his brilliant career, and the popular Puerto Rican was able to walk away with his belt. "That's true," said Morales, "but I also wrestled him in L.A. back when I was a kid and he was in his prime. And you know what? I think his teeth got sharper with age."

I believe "The Vampire" would have considered that a compliment.

Stu Saks
Publisher

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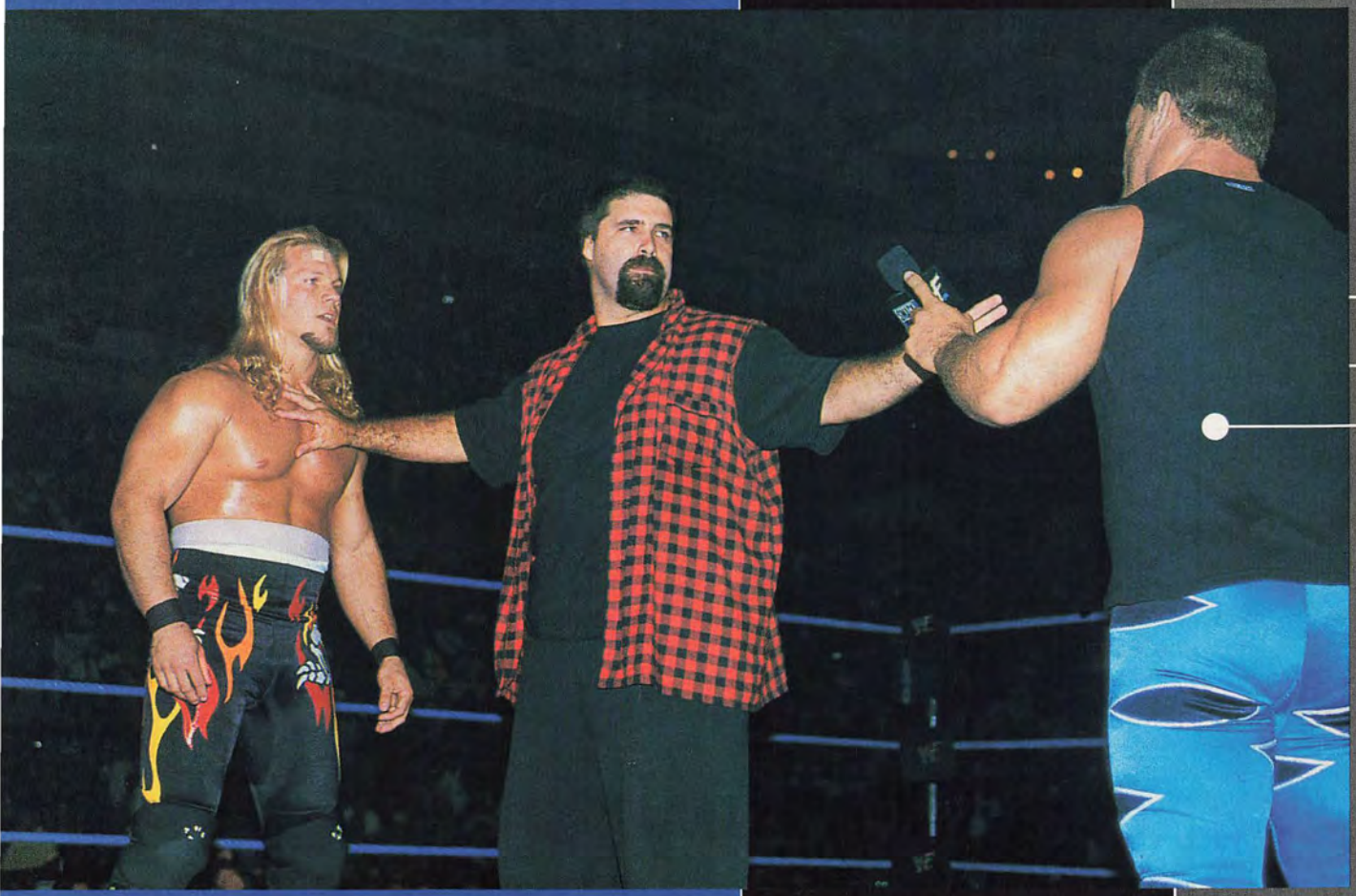

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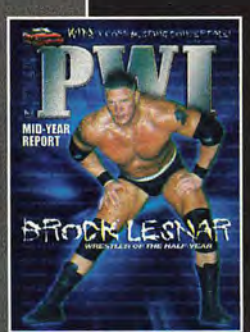

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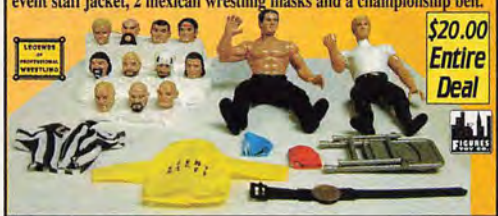

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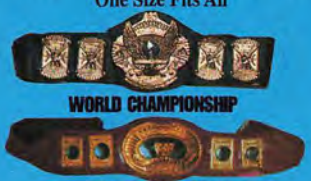

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before the bell

Compiled by Will Welsh

Back To School

For many professional wrestlers and wrestling personalities, life after wrestling can be a bit daunting. Quite a few are unprepared to enter the workforce, and for those who are prepared, living life on a regular Joe's salary just doesn't cut it. That's why so many wrestling personalities, after finding themselves without regular work in the ring, try to milk every ounce of their fame by hawking their services in the form of schooling. For example, former announcer Kevin Kelly, who parted ways with WWE this spring, recently held a wrestling business seminar in Manchester, New Hampshire. The marketing for the seminar promised that attendees would "learn the tricks of guaranteeing your tape will be seen and evaluated" and "how to do backstage pre-tapes, in-ring promos, and guest commentary"—and all for the low fee of $100!

Now, when we realized that a man whom The Rock repeatedly called "Hermie" on live national television could get $100 per attendee for something called a "wrestling business seminar," we were hit with inspiration. Surely, the creative minds at *PWI* could come up with business ventures for other personalities who no longer reside in the spotlight! Below are the best (or, worst) ideas we came up with.

THE BUFF BAGWELL SCHOOL OF NARCISSISM—Buff Bagwell teaches you how to have a successful wrestling career in spite of your natural inclination to behave as if everyone you talk to is an underling, and your fondness for graffiti-adorned top hats.

THE AMISH ROADKILL SCHOOL OF CHICKENRY—We don't even know if "chickenry" is a word, but when you establish yourself in an industry as difficult to break in to as wrestling by using a gimmick in which you only say the word "chickens," you're probably the most likely ex-star to establish a school of chickenry.

THE BOB BACKLUND SCHOOL OF DORKISM—Bob Backlund is one of the greatest champions in WWE history. Unfortunately, he's now known more for his recent runs as the bow-tied champion of dorks everywhere—and aspiring wrestling dorks have to have a school to attend, right?

THE JUSTIN CREDIBLE SCHOOL OF MEDIOCRITY—We like the name of this school because it sounds so darn incorrect. And let us say this: In no way do we believe that Justin Credible is mediocre. Seriously, Justin Credible is okay with us. Stop looking at us that way!

THE BIG BOSSMAN SCHOOL OF CHEAP HEAT—We're not sure how Ray Traylor does it, or how exactly he could teach it, but not many superstars can elicit the kind of hatred he does from crowds. The boos start as soon as the first few notes of his entrance music play!

THE SCOTT HALL SCHOOL OF MACHISMO—Once Scott Hall became Razor Ramon, he made a career of out being the coolest guy to ever step inside the ring, and now he can pass his vast knowledge of machismo to the general public. Rick Martel will appear as a guest speaker.

THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR SCHOOL OF DICTION—Learn how to talk like the man who talked us to death during his return to action in 1998 and write like the man who once wrote, "Adults who are not mentally retarded know the differences between right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate behavior." (Yup, that's right, he wrote it. Go to www.ultimatewarrior.com, click on "warrior writer posts," then click on "11.27.02." You'll find it right there.)

Talkin' Trash

Here's a list of the top 10 wrestling-related things you've been talking about lately and our gut reaction to each.

10. A.J. Styles defeats Raven and NWA champion Jeff Jarrett in a three-way match to win his first NWA championship. We were shocked when Styles and not Raven walked away with the title. However, we weren't shocked when the final pinfall came after outside interfere courtesy of Vince Russo. When will TNA officials learn that controversial finishes aren't controversial when they happen every week (sometimes twice a week)?

9. Sting debuts for NWA-TNA. Apparently those talks with WWE didn't go so well (but never say never).

8. Shane Douglas debuts for NWA-TNA. *Hmmmmmm,* maybe XPW (known in some circles as ECW West) won't be delivering the next wave of extreme after all.

7. Mick Foley returns to WWE TV. Mick resisted returning to WWE TV for so long, but his return to *Raw* to promote his new book, *Tietam Brown,* shows that everyone, even the most honorable of us, has a price.

6. Brock Lesnar superplexes The Big Show, collapsing the ring in the process. There's not much that we can say about the maneuver that closed the June 12 episode of *Smackdown* other than it was one of the most awesome sights we've ever seen.

5. Stacy Keibler appears at a licensing show in New York City. Newsworthy? Not at all. Are you talking about it? Probably not. An opportunity to print yet another picture of the lovely Stacy Keibler? Damn right!

4. WWE draws 15,000 fans for its first event (a house show no less!) in Portland, Oregon, in more than 10 years. We really don't see the big deal. No offense to any Oregonians reading this magazine, but what else is there to do in that state?

3. *Tough Enough 2* champion Linda Miles returns to WWE TV as Shanequa. Ohio Valley Wrestling promoter Jim Cornette can now breathe a little easier. That's one less *Tough Enough* champion for whom he's responsible!

2. Kurt Angle fires Charlie Haas and Shelton Benjamin. There's absolutely no truth to the rumors that Mike Rotundo, Rick Steiner, Kevin Sullivan, and "Dr. Death" Steve Williams, who formed The Varsity Club in the late-1980s, are going to replace the former Team Angle.

1. "Classy" Freddie Blassie dies at age 85. Angels are being called "pencil-neck geeks" for the very first time. Freddie, you'll be missed.

The Internet Insider

The following news items were culled from various wrestling-related Web sites—or were they? See if you can pick out the two items that were actually reported on the Internet (which doesn't necessarily mean that they are true) and the two that we blatantly made up. The answers appear at the end of the column on page 11.

1. NWA-TNA's Glenn Gilberti, who recently stopped using his Disco Inferno moniker (at least in most of the promotions for which he wrestles), was shocked to learn that the man whom he modeled the character after, John Travolta, was a fan. Early this spring, Gilberti was sitting at home when he received a phone call from Travolta asking what happened to the character. However, Gilberti didn't believe that it was Travolta on the phone, so he hung up on him. It was only after Travolta made a brief backstage appearance at a TNA show to meet Gilberti that Gilberti realized his mistake.

2. Here's an update on former WCW and WWE wrestler "Dr. Death" Steve Williams, who has spent the majority of the past couple of years wrestling for various Japanese promotions. The Norman, Oklahoma, native now lives in Shreveport, Louisiana, where he's a respected member of the business community thanks to his ownership of a tanning salon and a "Dr. Smoothies" smoothy shop.

3. WWE's Jamie Noble has taken his trailer park-livin' gimmick to heart by deciding to give back to the community from which he patterned the gimmick. Before every *Smackdown* taping, Noble rents a car and goes hunting for a trailer park. Once there, he rides around until he sees what he believes is the most dilapidated trailer on the lot. After he makes his selection, he hops out of the car and hands whomever is inside a check for $5,000, which he hopes will go

toward the purchase of a new trailer home.

4. World Wrestling All-Stars promoter Andrew McManus didn't impress too many fans during WWA's spring tour. First, McManus' announcing wasn't anything to be all that proud of, and he made repeated mentions of how small the live crowds were. One night, he blamed the small crowd on Scott Steiner's defection to WWE. Another night, he blamed it on late-arriving tram cars. Apparently he doesn't know enough not to point out to fans in a small crowd that they're fans in a small crowd.

This Month in Wrestling History

October

October 26, 1897: Dan McLeod beats Martin "Farmer" Burns in Indianapolis, Indiana, to capture the American heavyweight championship. (Not only was ol' Marty upset that McLeod beat him for the title, but he was ticked off that the best his marketing people could do for a nickname was "Farmer"!)

October 20, 1915: In the first World title meeting between the two wrestlers who would dominate the era, Joe Stecher beats Ed "Strangler" Lewis in Evansville, Indiana, to retain the title. Stetcher won after 2:03:00 of the first fall when Lewis was unable to continue after being driven out of the ring and hitting his head on the floor. (Back then, driving your opponent out of the ring and ramming his head into the floor was unheard of. Now, it's strategy. *Yippee!)*

October 22, 1979: Ivan Putski and Tito Santana beat Johnny and Jerry Valiant in New York City to win the WWF World tag team championship. (After the win, the leaders of Poland and Mexico, in a great show of solidarity, place phone calls to the new champions and offer their congratulations. Putski and Santana take time from their champagne celebration to take the calls.)

October 27, 1996: "Rowdy" Roddy Piper confronts WCW World champion Hulk Hogan after his title match at Halloween Havoc in Las Vegas. Their old WWF feud is rekindled as the two men argue over who is the bigger wrestling icon. (You guessed it: They were slow, past their primes, and they talked too much back then, too.)

October 7, 2002: Raw champion Triple-H accuses Intercontinental champion Kane of killing his high school sweetheart, Katie Vick, in a drunk driving accident and raping her corpse many years earlier. (What's surprising is that Kane took the accusation to heart instead of laughing at Triple-H and saying that what Triple-H just said was a crock because, as everyone knows, he never went to high school because, well, he's devil spawn.)

We Heard That!

"Granted, after the match, Jeff kicked my ass and then gave me the swanton, but for 10 minutes of my life, I stepped out of the indies, I stepped off of my path, and I was elevated into my dream, my goal, my reason to exist, and it felt so right."

—Indy wrestler Krazy K, discussing his recent defeat of former WWE superstar Jeff Hardy (who wrestled as his old alter ego, the masked Will of the Wisp), in an online commentary

"[Brock Lesnar attempting the shooting star press at WrestleMania was] quite disrespectful, because, I mean, yeah, he's the world champ, well now he is, and he's in the upper echelon, but the bottom line is there's a code of ethics that you just don't take other people's moves, especially finishing moves. I'm glad he's okay, don't get me wrong, I don't wish injury upon anybody, but, basically, I can go out there and basically F5 pretty much anybody. That's not a move that's impossible to do. But would I do it? No. Because it's a sign of respect. Anybody could choke-slam somebody, anybody could Rock bottom somebody, but nobody does it."

—Billy Kidman, throwing politics completely aside and bravely criticizing Brock Lesnar for his use of the shooting star press at WrestleMania, during an interview on *Byte This,* WWE's Internet radio show

"It was a great time. I enjoyed myself immensely. It was like one big party with everybody having a good time. I didn't

know what to expect. It took me a while to figure out the ropes and, for that matter, I'm still figuring out the ropes when I look back on it. But it was a good time."

—Tank Abbott, discussing his short-lived career with WCW, in an interview with wrestlingobserver.com

"This is my thing—WWE. I don't own one suit. I don't own one tie. I only wear one pair of dress shoes, and that's my bowling shoes."

—John Cena, talking about his sense of style, in an interview with wwe.com

"We don't have the sharks that we had in WCW, like [Kevin] Nash, [Hulk] Hogan, Macho [Randy Savage], who were just political masters. We don't have the sheer scope in size and difference in money. The one good thing about our locker room is guys such as me, Glenn Gilberti, and Brian James are always keeping the locker room in stitches, having fun, and making sure that everybody is happy."

—Konnan, talking about the differences between the NWA-TNA and WCW locker rooms, in an interview with the *Pro Wrestling Torch*

caption me!

Think you're a better writer than the editors at *PWI?* Here's your chance to prove it, punk! This 1992 photo of Hacksaw Duggan, Davey Boy Smith, and The Ultimate Warrior needs a short, concise, and clever caption. If you're up to the task, e-mail your zany quips to prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com, or slap a stamp on an envelope and snail-mail it to "Caption Me!" Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. Three issues from now, we'll share with you the best of the bunch—and the funnier the better.

June's Best

Ugggggghhhhhh! **Jim Cornette and Paul Bearer just found out what the dark side really is!**
—Mike Koivisto, Glendale, AZ

"Hey, he's the guy who stole our balls!"
—Tony Sanseverino, dirtyamoeba@yahoo.com

"Oooooh, my Undertaker ... please pull my finger! I dare you!"
—Hoop975@aol.com

"Damn you, Cornette! Undertaker and Kane think we just challenged them to a paddle-on-a-pole match!"
—Robert Payes, stiffshots@wrestlezone.com

Bearer: "Hey, look, Jim, it's Mae Young, and she's showing her puppies!" Cornette: "Where ... where?" Bearer: "Never mind, it's just Kane without his mask!"
—Juan Woolfolk, Woolfolk38@msn.com

Bearer: "Is that Vince Russo on NWA-TNA?" Cornette: "Better tell Jarrett to call his bankruptcy lawyer!"
—Darren Oliver, New Orleans, LA

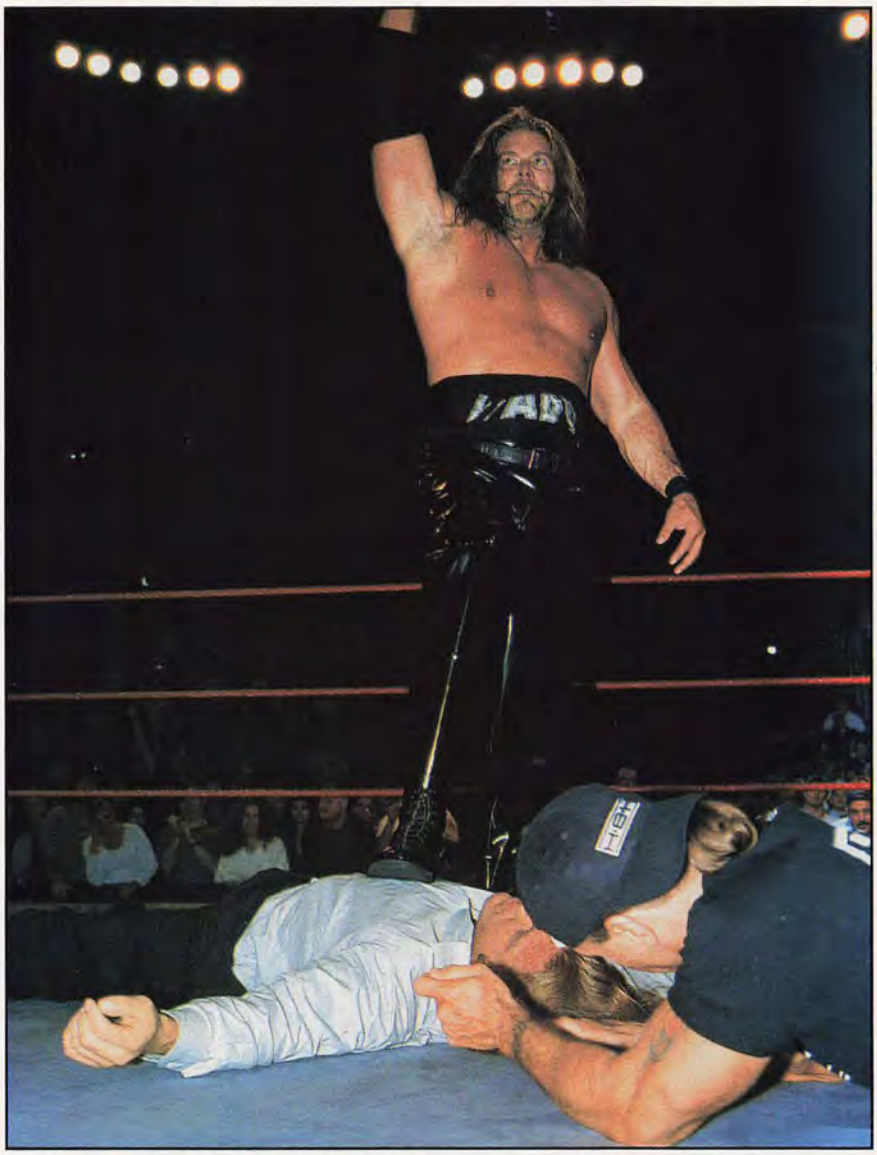
Answers to Internet Insider:

Items 1 and 3 are totally made up.

ringside

With Will Welsh

WWE QUIETLY BILLED the Bad Blood pay-per-view as the beginning of the next stage of the company's brand extension. Though it didn't go out of its way to say that the pay-per-view was going to be brand-exclusive and only feature wrestlers from Raw (Smackdown's wrestlers were busy with a house show in Lubbock, Texas, on the day of Bad Blood), the company did state that the show was being co-promoted by **Eric Bischoff** and **"Stone-Cold" Steve Austin**. And if you watched *Smackdown* in the weeks leading up to Bad Blood, you surely noted that **Michael Cole** and **Tazz** made no mention of Smackdown wrestlers appearing on the program. In fact, before Bad Blood even took place, Cole and Tazz had already begun shilling for Smackdown's first exclusive pay-per-view, Vengeance.



Kevin Nash had his moments against Raw champ Triple-H during the last few months, but he didn't come out on top when it mattered most, at Bad Blood. Okay, now what for the big man?

Yes, the era of brand-exclusive pay-per-views has begun; **Vince McMahon** can sit back and smile as he realizes yet another part of his dream has come to fruition. He just has to hope the buy rates for brand-exclusive are strong.

Now, I could run down the results of the show and tell you who won and who lost, but if you're reading this column, you probably know the results already. So, instead, let's concentrate on the biggest story of the pay-per-view that seemingly got lost in the mix: the deconstruction of **Kevin Nash**.

Beginning with his first stint in WWE as **Diesel**, Nash has been a controversial figure. When he was Diesel, he headed up a group of wrestlers known (backstage) as **The Kliq**. Together with **Shawn Michaels**, **Scott Hall**, **Sean Waltman**, and **Triple-H**, this clique ruled WWE like a group of unruly fraternity brothers. They pulled pranks, played politics, and outmaneuvered others in the locker room for prime spots on the card. When Nash jumped to WCW with Hall and created the **New World Order**, things remained status quo. Nash often got what he wanted in WCW when he wanted it, and his ability to play politics divided a lot of the wrestlers. By that point, he wasn't what you would call a popular locker room figure.

Then came his latest run with WWE. When Nash returned to WWE TV in the winter of 2002, he claimed to be a changed man. Though he was still the leader of the NWO, he vowed to work within a team frame-

Chris Jericho can pull a good match out of just about any opponent, including one who outweighs him by close to 100 pounds and is a foot taller, but will Nash cut it as a mid-carder in WWE in 2003?

work and help the company (and not just his friends) prosper—and to the shock of many, that's exactly what he did, or at least that's what he was attempting to do when he tore his quadriceps last summer. As a result of that injury, Nash went on the disabled list for nine long months before returning this spring. Amazingly enough, those nine months away from the sport motivated him even more.

Nash was more committed to making a difference and being a positive influence to those around him—which is why it was shocking to watch him become an afterthought in the hype leading up to his "Hell In A Cell" match with Triple-H at Bad Blood. Nash received little ring time and even less time behind the microphone to promote the match, and by the time Bad Blood rolled around, WWE was selling it as more of a conflict between special referee **Mick Foley** and Triple-H than as a match between Helmsley and Nash.

Somehow, Nash's presence in the match was deemed less important (even though he ended up turning in a reasonably good performance in a losing effort).

Given Nash's rather unscrupulous reputation, I'm sure that there were a lot of people—including many wrestlers in WWE's own locker room—who watched Nash's fate with a snicker. With the way that Nash conducted himself over the years, maybe some of that is justifiable. However, Nash's change of heart shouldn't go unnoticed. **Hulk Hogan** has rescued his once-soiled reputation by generously giving back, and Nash seemed on the verge of accomplishing that very same thing. For that, he should be commended, because it's not his fault that his legs weren't capable of carrying him to the finish line. He made the attempt—and that's what should be remembered. For some reason, I doubt it will be.

And now what does WWE Creative do with "Big Sexy"? Can he be moved into a mid-card role after being a headliner for the last eight years? His size and physical limitations given how many knee surgeries he has gone through will make that difficult. It will be interesting to see.

Thanks in great part to a guitar shot by none other than **Vince Russo**, **A.J. Styles** is your new NWA heavyweight champion. The victory came on the June 11 NWA-TNA pay-per-view during a three-way match that involved Styles, **Raven**, and defending champion **Jeff Jarrett**. Entering the match, Raven was the decided favorite to walk away with the belt, but the debuting **Shane Douglas** attacked him and left him laying, leaving only Styles and Jarrett in the ring. Styles, who had the upper hand even before Russo interfered on his behalf by walloping Jarrett with the guitar, quickly followed up on the guitar shot with a Styles clash for the win and the championship.

While I would have liked to have seen the NWA championship change hands without controversy, that simply isn't TNA's way. (Basically, TNA's motto seems to be the following: If a match can end through outside interference in order to progress a storyline, it will.) However, with that said, Styles' unexpected victory came as a

All A.J. Styles needed was a little help from (who else but) Vince Russo to end Jeff Jarrett's seven-month NWA title reign. The finish of the match may have been shaky, but the NWA has a very strong champ in place in the form of Styles.

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refreshing twist. He may only be a five-year veteran, but he has shown more style (no pun intended) and class than many wrestlers with twice his experience. The word "gentleman" doesn't even begin to describe him outside the ring.

Styles also brings something else to the table: He could actually wrestle and defend the title on nights other than Wednesdays on shows run by promotions such as Ring of Honor. And to top it all off, unlike many TNA regulars who openly advertise themselves to WWE, Styles has gone on the record on numerous occasions to say that he isn't interested in jumping to the biggest of the big time right now. Considering all of that, he might be the very best representative that TNA has to offer.

Also on the June 11 pay-per-view, TNA diva **Desire** suffered a fractured tailbone and a broken L1 bone in her back during a dark match against **Mercedes**. At press time, she was wearing a very uncomfortable brace that extended from her waist all the way to her neck to aid the healing process. Here's wishing the beautiful starlet a quick recovery.

Finally, while the heyday of **"Classy" Freddie Blassie** was a bit before my time (okay, *a long while* before my time), I followed his WWE managerial career as best as a 10-year-old could. I have to admit that back then, I couldn't stand "The Hollywood Fashion Plate." He called people "pencil-neck geeks," and I took extreme umbrage at that because I was, in fact, a pencil-neck geek. My dislike for Blassie grew even further when I was 12, because I couldn't understand how he could turn his back on America and lead someone like **The Iron Sheik** to victory over a great American like **Bob Backlund**! Only after I joined *PWI* and managed to sneak a few looks at old magazines and leaf through old, dusty photographs did I begin to realize just how much he had contributed to the sport over the decades. He was one of the all-time greats.

That does it for me this month, fans. Enjoy your wanderings. ☐

It's not easy being a diva ... in any promotion. NWA-TNA valet/wrestler Desire ended up in a brace stretching from her neck to her waist after a painful match against Mercedes.

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in focus

By Dave Lenker

TOUGH TIMES

Nobody in any walk of life likes a complainer, least of all me. We all have our problems, so who wants to listen to someone else's, especially the trivial ones? Wrestling has its share of complainers, too. "I should be in the main event" ... "So-and-so deserves better than to be buried in a storyline like that" ... "How can they expect me to lose to *him?*" Believe it or not, though, there are a few people out there—five at least—who have some semi-legitimate gripes and really *ought* to complain. You know, these days, it's tough being ...

Jim Cornette must just shake his hand and swear whenever he sees Doug Basham and Damaja (or is it Danny Basham?). The great rivalry between the two in OVW turned into a promising partnership in WWE overnight ... literally.

Lilian Garcia. Beautiful woman, improved ring announcer, sweet personality. But it's the voice that really makes this woman. I'll never forget her emotional rendition of our national anthem at a live *Smackdown* in Texas just two days after the horrors of September 11 changed all of our lives forever. She belts out a wonderful version of the national anthem each and every Monday night at *Raw* ... only she doesn't always make it to "the home of the brave" anymore. La Resistance—Rene Dupree and Sylvan Grenier—have taken to getting perhaps the cheapest of all cheap heat by cueing up their music in the middle of Lilian's singing and storming out to confront her and insult all of us ugly Americans. Kind of tacky on WWE's part, if you ask me, and kind of ruins Lilian's moment, too. What's the next for these French-fried fools, turning Stacy Keibler Parisian just so WWE can trot her out to the ring in a skimpy French maid outfit every week? Come to think of it, that's not such a bad idea.

Jim Cornette. The Ohio Valley Wrestling promoter has never been the most even-tempered, patient man, and that used to be a major strength. Loud, obnoxious, and hotheaded are all great qualities for a wrestling manager to have. When you're running the farm team for WWE, you have to *try* to be patient. And I'm sure James E. has tried and tried and then tried some more. He understands that his top prospects (and maybe even a few that aren't quite ready) could be called up to WWE with little advance notice. He should take it as a compliment when they are promoted. But consider the problem he faced when Doug Basham and Damaja were bumped up to Smackdown this spring. Months earlier, Basham and Damaja were allies in a clique called The Revolution. Then Basham, who regained the OVW

heavyweight title in April, betrayed Damaja and booted him from The Revolution. Their feud was the hottest in the promotion. Then both got that long-awaited callup—as "brothers" Doug and Danny Basham. Brothers with a tight bond in WWE most of the time, unrelated, bitter blood rivals in OVW the rest of the time. Good luck weaving some logic into that, Jim.

Adam Copeland. His alter ego, Edge, will remain in hibernation for at least another half-year. Had he waited just a few weeks to have the spinal surgery of the WWE stars, he was quick to point out to everyone who would listen, he, too, would have known about the less invasive surgery that Kurt Angle ultimately had, and he, too, could have at least weighed that option. Had he chosen that option and gone under the knife of Dr. Hae-Dong Jho, he'd almost certainly be back in the ring right now. Instead he's pounding out weekly columns for wwe.com, counting down the months until his in-ring return. I'd like to think his push will be huge when he returns, but that's hardly a certainty. It's too bad this had to happen to someone with such a passion for what he does. Give him credit for maintaining a positive outlook, however. Let's see how positive he is in, say, November.

Kanyon. Who better than Kanyon? Apparently dozens of WWE wrestlers, that's who, at least according to WWE Creative. The injury bug doesn't let up on this guy. Seems like he's been rehabbing and splitting time between WWE and OVW (where his in-ring work has gotten terrific reviews) for half a year now, and about the only thing Creative has been able to find for him to do so far is dress like Boy George and sing "Do You Really Want To Hurt Me?" to The Undertaker for one night on *Smackdown.* Oh, and he gets a decent amount of face time on *Velocity* as well, for what that's worth. Here's another guy with a lot of passion and a great work ethic. He should at least get a chance to show something.

Jeff Jarrett. Talk about your thankless jobs. I'm not sure anyone outside the Jarrett family (wrestling journalists certainly included) knows just how much time ol' "Slappy" devotes to NWA-TNA each week, but I know it's a lot. There are deals to negotiate, details to be worked out, shows to be planned and organized, and investors to schmooze. He does a lot more than wrestle. Yet he has become the new whipping boy for the smart crowd. He supposedly pushed himself as a Superman-like NWA champion because, well, he and his father are minority owners of TNA. Well, he may not wrestle as much as he should, given that fans must pay $9.95 each week to see the TNA cards, but he gave us some compelling matches during his six months-plus as champion, and I suspect that the shows with the highest buy rates featured him prominently. Nevertheless, he had better get used to the bashing, deserved or not.

QUICK PLUG

If you're a big fan of the *"PWI* 500," you'll be happy to learn that it will be bigger than ever this year. So big, in fact, that a regular issue of *PWI* couldn't possibly contain it. So we moved it from the December 2003 issue of *PWI* to the mega-gigantic 180-page Fall 2003 issue of *PWI Presents.* That means more in-depth bios than you've ever seen before in the "*PWI* 500," more breathtaking photos than ever before, and—get this!—a comprehensive index of all the wrestlers ever to appear in the "500" since its inception in 1991! This can't-miss superspecial goes on sale on or about September 9.

(Have a comment or question about "In Focus" or anything else you see in ***PWI?*** *You can contact Dave Lenker via e-mail at dave_lenker@yahoo.com.)* □

Kanyon probably thinks he's better than A-Train, yet the only people who will see if he can prove that he is are those who tune in to *Velocity* late on Saturday nights. For some reason, Creative draws a blank when it looks at him.

off the top rope

By Brandi Mankiewicz

If you wish to contribute to Brandi's mailbag, send your letters to:
TOP ROPE Box 1148 Ft. Washington, PA 19034
Or send e-mail to: **offthetoprope@yahoo.com**

(Editor's note: The opinions expressed in this column are those of the letter writers and Brandi Mankiewicz herself. They do not necessarily reflect the editorial views of this magazine.)

*I KNOW A big secret that you don't. No, it has nothing to do with Kane's batter-dipped, crispy fried face. My secret is more intriguing. I know who is Number One in the "**PWI** 500" ... and who fills the other 499 spaces. While I can't reveal who is ranked where, I can tell you that this year's edition is very different from the past. There are a lot of shakeups, which are good for the industry, but they might stun you and those who are listed—and not listed.*

But, who am I to not whet your appetite with at least one little morsel. All I will say is that with only one major federation in the world, the independents, Japanese, and Mexican wrestlers had the chance to step up their game and be duly recognized for their efforts. How did they fare? I'm not telling. I truly don't mean to be a tease, but I must keep this knowledge to myself. Otherwise, it would spoil your surprise. We all know how few surprises there are in this business now that every armchair booker reads the Internet.

Why would I treat you in such a fashion? Because I can. There's not anything you can do about it because I am your champion, whether you like it or not.

Queen Brandi,

Can you please explain to me why in the blue hell WWE wants to bring back stars like Roddy Piper and Sable? These are people who ripped WWE like it was piece of garbage in the past, and to be perfectly frank, are no longer relevant to WWE fans. I also hear that WWE is planning on bringing back Lex Luger, a total waste of oxygen if there ever was one. Brandi, you'd think that if they were going to bring in anyone at all, they'd bring in Low-Ki, who is amazing, or La Parka, the former 'Chairman' of WCW. These guys wouldn't boost ratings, at least not initially, but would prove to be far more relevant than a guy like Goldberg who can't wrestle more than five minutes, or Lex Luger, who just plain sucks.

JESSE BOWMAN
Crozzbonez2000@yahoo.com

Reader Jesse,

For whatever reason, Vinnie Mac and Company have lost their ability to be the forward-thinking people that they have always been. With WWE being the solitary leader in this drop downward, VM & C are panicking instead of brainstorming. With no real competition to criticize and learn from, the collective brain of the Fed is trying to throw old spare body parts into the air and make one of them fly. It somewhat worked when they brought Hulk Hogan back. In theory, why wouldn't it work with others? Unfortunately, VM & C have reprogrammed fans to not remember the past and only pop for fancy entrances and silly skits. Like a mass of Pavlov's dogs, the fans have reacted to what they've been conditioned to like and dislike. They drool with the slightest command as long as the stimulus calls for that reaction. Otherwise, they sit there, clap politely, and wait for the next bikini contest. It's the negative aspect of the "Attitude" generation. Another unfortunate aspect of this is no matter who you put out there, from Low-Ki to Christopher Daniels to any nameless WWE developmental, the fans will inevitably crap on it.

Dear Brandi,

I don't understand why the hell you got a problem with Joanie Laurer! I mean she was and still is a talented wrestler. Much respect to Victoria and Jazz, but Joanie could whoop there asses any day of the week! And Trish. Trish Stratus has gotten better since she first started in WWE. She went from Vince's

Jesse Bowman wants to see Low-Ki stretching any WWE wrestler on Raw or Smackdown instead of Christopher Daniels on a Ring of Honor card. While that might be nice for Low-Ki, it isn't the answer to WWE's problem. That answer must come from deep within Vinnie Mac's creative mind.

slave girl to a fine woman wrestler. I agree a lot with Matt and Jakey. All I have to say about this is, "Good minds think alike" and I really don't mean our minds! Shame on you, Brandi, for talking trash on good wrestlers like Joanie Laurer and Trish Stratus!

Later,
Tina Anderson
LisaMarieFan5482@aol.com

Dear Tina,

I don't have a problem with Joanie Laurer or Trish Stratus. I have a problem with how fans grant them demigod status. They are fallible and, in my opinion, aren't fulfilling their full potential. But why should I rewrite everything that I've written ad nauseam in this column. I'll let this guy do it for me:

Dear Brandi,

Thank you for the many positive comments you have made about Victoria. Your column is one of the few places one can find any appreciation for this beautiful and talented wrestler.

She is routinely ignored or overlooked by WWE. What do you have to do to get any respect in that organization? The *Monday Night Raw* crew rarely have a good word to say about her. They seem to be obsessed with Trish Stratus, as if she were the only reason to watch the show. It is irritating watching the endless adoration Trish receives within the company. Victoria deserves better than to be regarded as a member of a supporting cast. She is second to no one in either talent or beauty.

I am sure that Victoria has many fans, but it must be acknowledged that this is as much in spite of the WWE as because of it. Her determination and character come through regardless of how much the company tries to tell us otherwise.

GEORGE PICARDI
Boston, MA

Letter of the month (taken verbatim from the actual letter to share my torture with you all):

Dear Brandi

PWI's critasiszum of the WWE is ridiculous considering the fact that most of your pages are about the promotion. You talk about some wrestlers like there worthless. Take Albert/A-train for example why I did not know of his whole WWF/WWE history he surprised me a few weeks ago on Smackdown! when he fought Brock Lesnar in a match in which he did pretty well compared Lesnar's other victims such as Kurt Angle or 'Taker. This particular match made me wonder why Albert did not get more of a push. I would like to also comment on the whole Kane/bad story line issue. I believe your criticism of him is bias and uncalled for. Time and time again your publication fells to mention Kane's previous accomplishes. Up until a few days ago I would have agreed with all the bad stuff that has been said about him until I researched his career and tag team title wins rivaling that of Booker T. Proving that most of this magazine was bias was quite easy. Take Triple-H for example looking at his title wins it appeared he had a career before the WWF/WWE. Why is there no mention of his International Wrestling Federation days. Your last PWI winner was pure favoritism and Undertaker beating RVD should have put him on the top. I've also found cases of low recognition that you should clear up. It seems that being a former WWF or WCW champion around here makes it your middle name. Bret Hart is often referred to as the former WWF and WCW champion along with other former WCW champs such as Goldberg but why is it that Curt Henning or Kane never referred to as World Champions?

Thank you for your time.

DEANGELO KELLOGG
jim88z@hotmail.com

Don't blink! You'll miss Kane with the World title. His reign of a whopping one day is so embarrassing that we really should never speak of it again.

Deangelo,

Wow! I'm begging you to please use that spell check feature on your computer's word processing program. It would make life so much easier on everyone. Now, we criticize WWE when necessary. If we didn't, the positive things we write would not have merit. If you want the shiny, happy version of the happenings in WWE, I suggest signing up to receive the company's press releases. As for history lessons on each wrestler, I suggest turning to pages 22, 23, 96, and 97 and buying any back issue that includes those wrestlers you have mentioned. As for Kane's World title reign, it was a pathetic one day event. As for Curt Hennig's reign atop the AWA in 1987, well, that's a dead issue. □

krew-cuts

By Frank Krewda

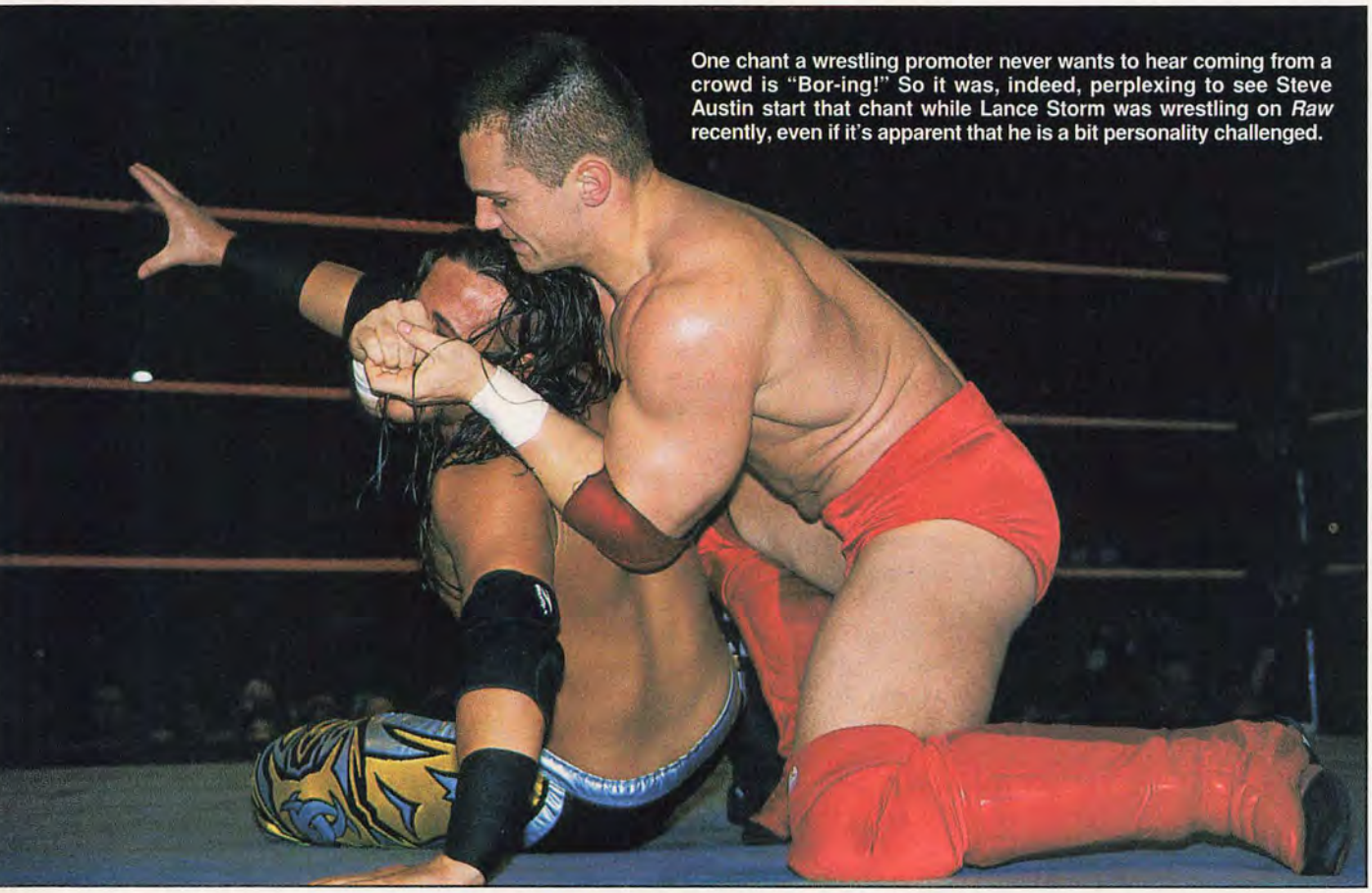
Oh, those crazy McMahons. Perhaps the most unusual facet of professional wrestling is the way one's career can advance and recede simultaneously. Witness Lance Storm, who ostensibly should benefit from working a program with "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin, one of the most popular WWE superstars on the Raw side.

Storm probably expected his feud—if I can even call it that—with Austin to springboard him into a few high-profile matches and thus into fans' consciousness. I know I did. Instead, Vinnie Mac is using it to shovel dirt on Storm's career.

For those of you who spent the of evening of June 16 engaged in more edifying pursuits than *Raw,* Austin came out and shouted "Bor-ing!" from the ramp while Storm grappled some forgettable newcomer named Garrison Cade. Austin feigned a nap, and told Storm that watching one of his matches worked "better than sleeping pills." With Storm more interested in the intrusion than the fans or his opponent, the intrepid Mr. Cade schoolboyed him for the upset pinfall.

Curious strategy that—trying to generate fan interest by reminding the fans just how boring a wrestler in WWE has become. Maybe McMahon's course of action wouldn't have been so perplexing had Austin's carping not been so true. For all his athleticism, accessibility, and technically savvy, Lance Storm is, indeed, a bland personality. The secret's been out for years. Drawing attention to Storm's one and only glaring weakness can't be good for him or for WWE business.

Splitsville, man. A few columns back, I called Rena "Sable" Mero's holier-than-thou attitude into question after she returned to WWE as if she had never filed a $110-million lawsuit against the company. I also criticized the depth of hubby Marc Mero's religious convictions for standing idly by as his wife seemingly contradicted their sanctimonious bleatings. Perhaps my criticism was misplaced after all. Published reports suggest the couple has separated. I



One chant a wrestling promoter never wants to hear coming from a crowd is "Bor-ing!" So it was, indeed, perplexing to see Steve Austin start that chant while Lance Storm was wrestling on *Raw* recently, even if it's apparent that he is a bit personality challenged.

can't say for certain whether Sable's recent HLA peccadilloes with Torrie Wilson caused the split.

But I can say that Sable looks right at home in her current role. Maybe even more at home than incumbent sex kitten Torrie. Reports from various house shows suggest that Sable routinely shows up in better "bikini shape" than Wilson, and if the fans had, indeed, been allowed to judge the bikini contest between the two at Judgment Day, Sable would have won easily. From what I've seen on *Smackdown* and pay-per-view, I can't disagree with that assessment.

More hot bodies. I do, however, disagree with fans who act as if the sight of Mae Young's thong-covered backside at Bad Blood was the most revolting sight ever seen. Considering the age of its owner, I found it to be surprisingly unrevolting, and infinitely more attractive than Rikishi's and Vince McMahon's.

Unattractive though his rear end may be, Vince is sporting a physique so buff and bronzed these days that one has to marvel at how a middle-aged man can transform himself from a pale, somewhat doughy exec to a ripped performer so stunningly.

Randy Orton is yet another interesting physical specimen. To the eye, Orton looks lithe yet sturdy. But his history of injury in his young WWE career tells a different story, as Mick Foley so bluntly pointed out to fans on June 16 in Dallas.

Some of us might have forgotten to make the comparison of this third-generation star to his father, Bob Orton Jr. (remember the cast), but fortunately, Foley was on hand to connect the dots (and try to bury Randy a la Storm). Apparently, Orton hasn't "evolved" far enough to suit Mrs. Foley's little boy.

Buzz cuts. Staying on the subject of Evolution, the fact that Flair and Triple-H shopped so aggressively for a fourth member of their group can't bode well for Batista, who recently re-tore his triceps while jogging (jogging!?) with his wife ...Three Minute Warning was cut to 90 seconds recently, as WWE released Jamal from his contract. Wonder what Rosey was doing so much better than Jamal. In any case, perhaps the merciful dissolution of this abomination was what created a spot for the slimmer and sexier Jackie Gayda, who now serves as Rico's valet. Jackie's outfits alone have already made me forget about her notorious match with Trish Stratus last summer ... More angst on the Goldberg front. Word is Bill's unhappy not only with the handling of his character, but also with some comments recently attributed to Linda McMahon, who characterized Goldberg's run so far in WWE as a "disappointment" during a media conference call ... As much as I'd like to see His Smugness knocked down a peg or two, I feel compelled to point out, as I did in my previous column, that Bill Goldberg can't become something special unless he's presented as something special. WWE gave him big money and scheduling perks for a reason. Linda should be disappointed in WWE, not Goldberg ... I suppose Scott Steiner deserves some applause for winning over Stacy Keibler. However, something about him fighting for good against Eric Bischoff and Test just doesn't feel right. At this stage of his career, Steiner's overwhelming contempt for everyone and everything should be his greatest asset. Filtering out that rage just seems to dilute the "Freakzilla" character ... Finally, 10 bells to Freddie Blassie, whose body finally gave out on him on June 2. Of course, Freddie's career is spotlighted in this issue's *"Wrestling Observer* Hall Of Fame" feature and will garner a well-deserved retrospective in the November issue of *The Wrestler.* However, the thing I remember most about him was that despite the bleached hair, gaudy outfits, and gruff voice, he never seemed cartoonish, not even in the 1980s, when wrestling cartoons were part of the mega-boom. No matter what medium Blassie appeared on, he always seemed to be slightly off his rocker, which was a good thing. □

Rico's new gimmick is very reminiscent of that of 1980s star Adrian Street, and if Jackie Gayda keeps on playing the role Miss Linda played for Street as well as she has, a lot of people might forget about her hideous showdown with Trish Stratus last summer.

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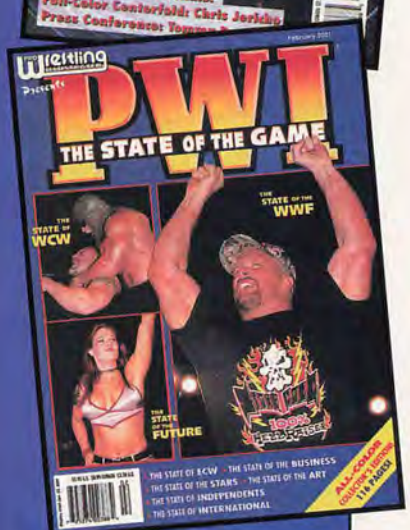

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press conference...

The dispute between Mick Foley and Vince McMahon that led to Foley's departure from WWE a few years ago was really just a disagreement, and he never completely left the company. Now it appears as if he is in the promotion's future plans.

MICK FOLEY

ON JUNE 9, Mick Foley ended his 18-month sabbatical from WWE.

The three-time WWF World champion walked away from the promotion after a meeting with Vince McMahon on-board McMahon's private jet that was taped to be shown on ***Raw.*** *At the time, Foley professed he had lost his passion for the wrestling business.*

It wasn't easy for Foley to admit he had lost that passion. After all, a deep love of the wrestling business is what drove the awkward kid from Long Island, New York, to become both the King of the Death Match and one of the most popular WWF World champions ever.

Foley told the world about the odd journey he took—and the injuries he absorbed on the way—to make a childhood dream come true in his first book, ***Have A Nice Day: A Tale Of Blood And Sweatsocks.*** *Foley's irreverent sense of humor and natural storytelling ability propelled* ***Have A Nice Day*** *to the top of the* ***New York Times*** *bestseller list. The sequel,* ***Foley Is Good ... And The Real World Is Faker Than Wrestling****, shot to the top of the* ***Times*** *bestseller list as well.*

Foley added to his literary success with a pair of children's books, ***Mick Foley's Christmas Chaos*** *and* ***Mick Foley's Halloween High Jinx.*** *He closed out his wrestling career at WrestleMania XVI. Following his retirement, Foley was appointed WWF commissioner by Linda McMahon until he left the promotion near the end of 2001.*

Over the past 18 months, Foley has maintained a low public profile, but he has kept himself busy. His debut novel, entitled ***Tietam Brown****, is now at bookstores everywhere. The book tells the story of Antietam (Andy) Brown, a 17-year-old boy incarcerated in the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center for murder. Brown is released from the center into the custody of the father that had given him up for adoption; that father is a crude, beer-swilling former pro wrestler also named Tietam Brown. The story is a complex look at the relationship between fathers and sons, and the trials of the human spirit.*

On June 9, Foley returned to ***Raw*** *and was named guest referee for the "Hell In A Cell" match between Triple-H and Kevin Nash at Bad Blood. In a special phone interview conducted just days later, Senor Writer Dan Murphy talked to Foley about his thoughts on the current WWE product, his new book, a possible comeback, and a lot more.*

DAN MURPHY: First of all, what did it feel like walking out under the Titan-Tron again on June 9 after being away for so long?

MICK FOLEY: I always maintain that I didn't really miss wrestling, because I had the writing to fill that creative urge and I was still in contact with a lot of people in wrestling, so it's not like I was totally out of it. But until you get back out there and hear the crowd and feel that energy, you forget what a great feeling it is. It was great to be back.

MURPHY: You were assigned to be the special referee for the Triple-H-Kevin Nash "Hell In A Cell" match at Bad Blood.

"IT'S FUNNY. MY EDITOR FOR THIS BOOK HAD NEVER HEARD OF ME BEFORE AND HAD NEVER SEEN ME. THE FIRST TIME WE TALKED ON THE PHONE, SHE HAD A COPY OF MY BIO AND SHE SAID, 'IM LOOKING AT A PICTURE OF A BIG, SCRAGGLY HAIRED GUY MISSING A FEW TEETH. IS THAT REALLY YOU? YUP, THATS THE AUTHOR."

Considering it was your first time back in a ring in 19 months and the injuries Triple-H and Nash have suffered in recent years, did you have any concerns about this match? Did you feel this match could live up to the legacy that has been created for the "Hell In A Cell" bouts?

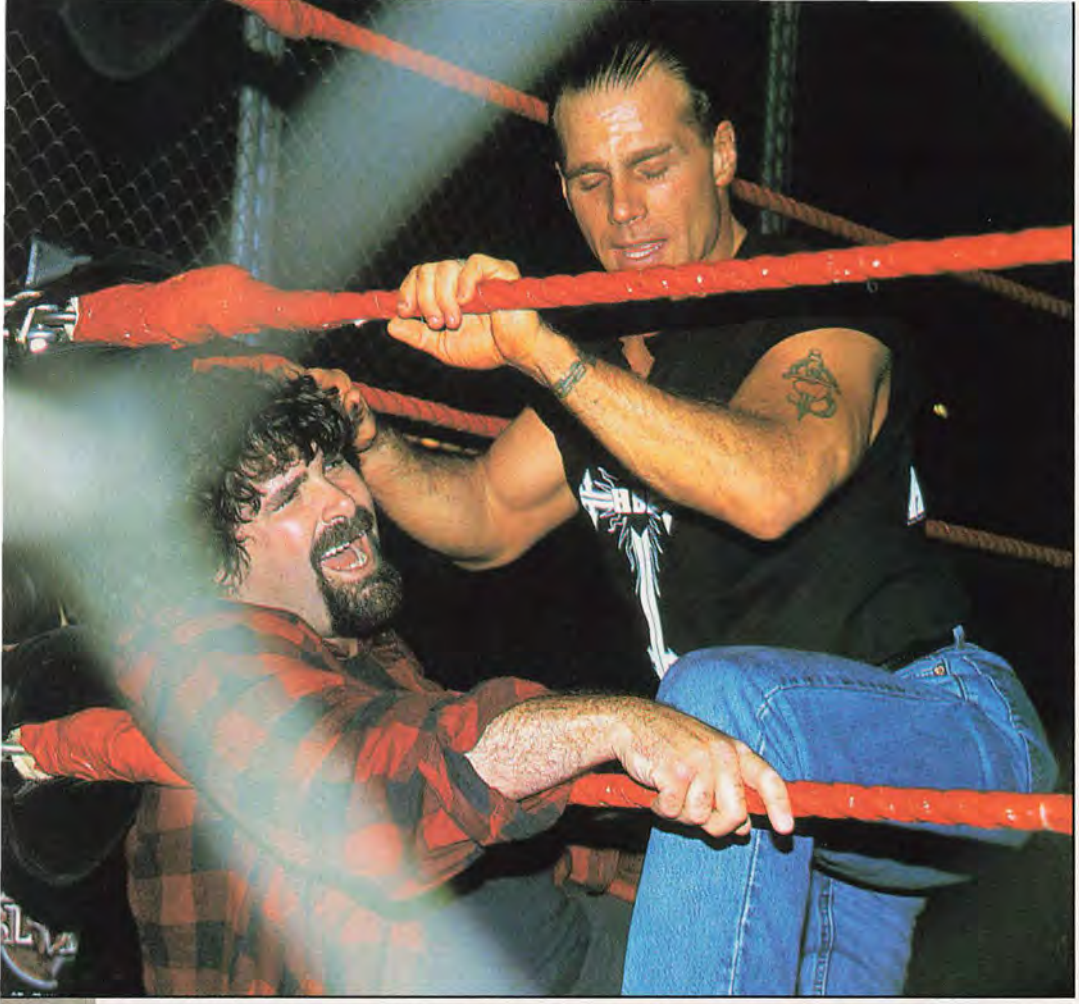
FOLEY: That's exactly what I was worried about. Anytime you have a "Hell In A Cell" match, there's always that fear that it's not going to live up to its heritage, the legacy. That's why I wanted to get involved. People hear "Hell In A Cell," and they think of me. I don't know if there's ever been one person as synonymous with a match as I am with this, unless it's Dusty Rhodes with the bullrope match. Honestly, it's hard to live up to—not the past, but the legend of the past. I think the fall I took off the top of the cage at King of the Ring in '98 keeps getting higher and higher in people's minds.

MURPHY: I seem to remember it being up to about 35 feet.

FOLEY: Yeah. That seems to be the current consensus these days.

MURPHY: You've had some time away from WWE now. Do you still regularly watch *Raw* and *Smackdown?* What are your thoughts on the current product

Every issue, reporters from PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED will participate in an incisive press conference with a top wrestling star. The questions will be demanding. And the answers will reveal the innermost thoughts of the giants of the sport.



Foley (being helped up by Shawn Michaels) got a little more physical than he intended to on his first night back in WWE.

> "WHEN I TOLD VINCE HE HAD TAKEN A LOYAL EMPLOYEE AND RUINED HIS PASSION FOR THE BUSINESS, I WAS SPEAKING STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART. AFTER A LITTLE TIME AWAY, I WAS ABLE TO REGAIN PERSPECTIVE. ABOUT 90 PERCENT OF MY EXPERIENCES IN WWE WERE POSITIVE. BUT AT THAT TIME, ALL THAT WAS ON MY MIND WERE THE OTHER 10 PERCENT."

and how it compares to 1999 and 2000, when things were so hot?

FOLEY: I am a regular fan of WWE. I went through a period of about six months where I was working on the book and I couldn't watch as often as usual. I find myself tuning in and enjoying it. One of the things I like is that now I can read and get work done as I watch. I don't have to follow it as closely as I did before. As for how it compares to a few years ago, I think the demise of WCW has hurt the WWE product. Vince McMahon thrived on the competition, and it really pushed him to make his company the best. If you compare 2003 to 1996, I think the shows are miles ahead. I think the product may be a little behind where it was in 1999 due to the lack of competition. On the whole, wrestling is much better today than it used to be.

MURPHY: Do you have a personal preference for either *Raw* or *Smackdown* at this point? Do you see a true distinction between the two brands?

FOLEY: Yes, I think there is a distinct difference. *Smackdown* is more geared toward pure wrestling, while *Raw* is a little more driven by personalities and storylines. Personally, I'll always be partial to *Raw* because of what that show has meant to me over the years. I had some unforgettable times on that show. To me, *Raw* is still the must-see show.

MURPHY: What is your current relationship with WWE? Last time we saw you on TV, you walked out on Vince McMahon after a meeting on the WWE corporate jet saying you were turned off about the product.

FOLEY: *(Laughs)* I think people thought the split was a lot more heated than it was. Since I left, I've frequently talked to some of the WWE marketing people about doing children's books. I helped out writing some stories for "Stone-Cold's" upcoming book, so I maintained a relationship with WWE. When I did reach out to become involved in "Hell In A Cell," it wasn't out of nowhere. I had been thinking about getting involved at SummerSlam, but this opportunity came along earlier. On-air, when I was fired on the plane, Vince and I went at it in a skit that was completely steeped in reality. When I told Vince he had taken a loyal employee and ruined his passion for the business, I was speaking straight from the heart. After a little time away, I was able to regain perspective. About 90 percent of my experiences in WWE were positive, but at that time, all that was on my mind were the other 10 percent.

MURPHY: How did the time away from the ring change your mindset? What did you do to turn yourself around?

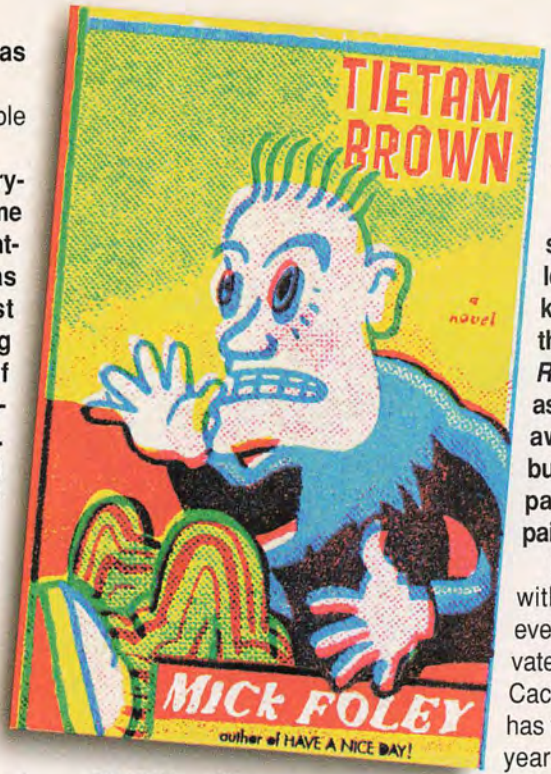
FOLEY: I think the time away was very beneficial to me. It made me concentrate on life outside of wrestling. I've been trying to use this gift of popularity I've been given to help chari-

ties and work with kids, as well as spend time with my own family.

MURPHY: What type of charitable work have you been doing?

FOLEY: I think just about everyone in wrestling is involved to some degree with the various wish-granting foundations. I found that was one of the things I missed most about wrestling. I started making calls on my own. I have a list of kids I keep in touch with. I volunteer at camps and things like that. That sort of work, with kids and charities, is the most satisfying of all the things I've done.

MURPHY: All the injuries you've sustained in your career are well-documented: 325 stitches, eight concussions, three knee surgeries, several broken bones, the loss of one ear and two teeth. The last time I spoke to you (about three years ago), you noted how ironic it was that you achieved your greatest fame when you were in the worst physical condition of your life. Has that time off helped you recover from the years of abuse, or are those chronic pains a permanent part of your life?

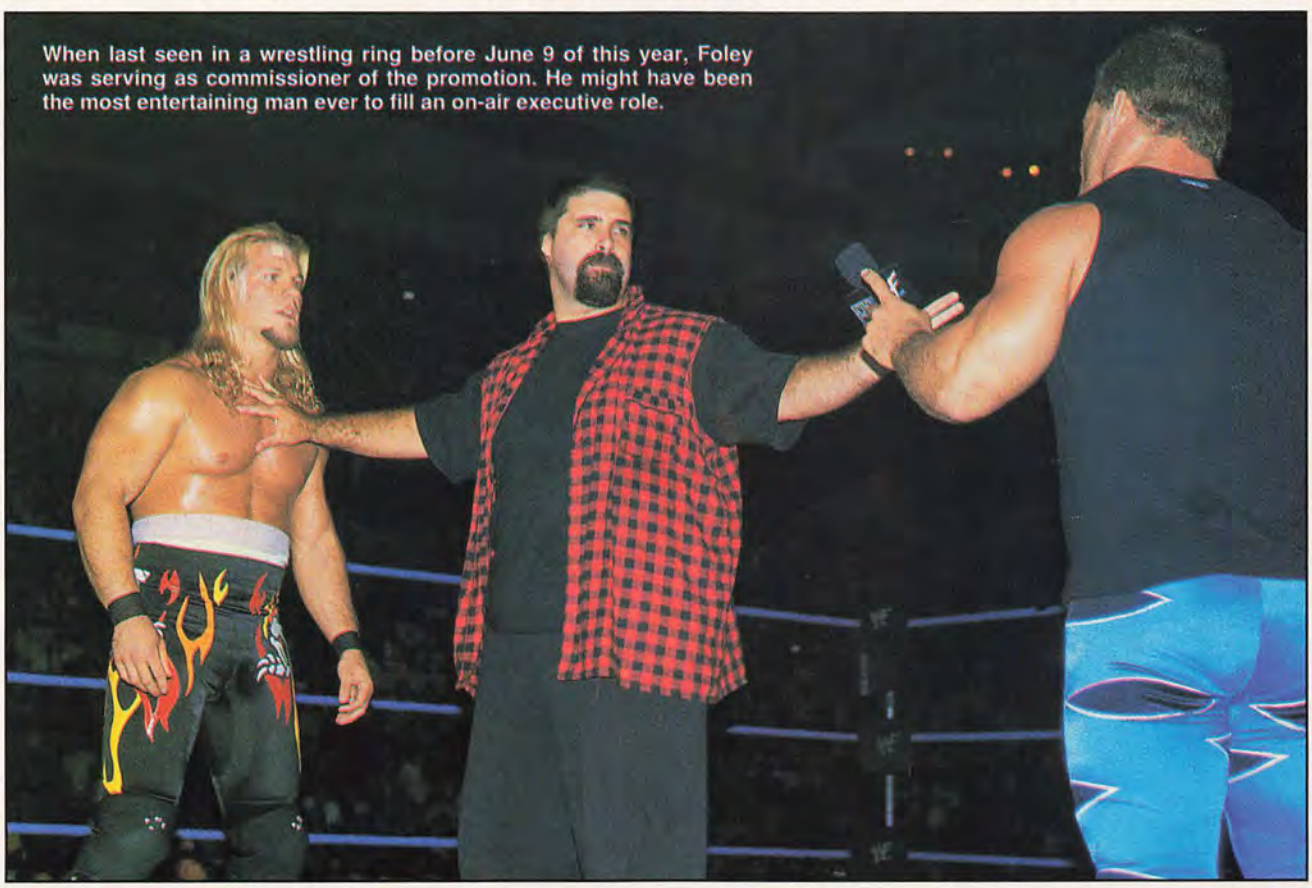


Foley's first work of fiction, *Tietam Brown*, is, oddly enough, about a former pro wrestler, but it's not a book about wrestling. He considers it dark, depressing, uplifting, and, at times, funny.

FOLEY: I'm sure I'll have to deal with some pain for the rest of my life, especially my neck, which is always sore. The thing is, I've grown used to being in pain, so it doesn't seem so bad for me. If someone else were to miraculously wake up in my body, I don't know, maybe they'd be looking for the pain pills. When I came back to *Raw,* some of the wrestlers were asking me if the pain ever does go away. All of us in the wrestling business deal with a certain level of pain. If you're lucky, most of the pain does go away.

MURPHY: You had a lot to do with building Triple-H into a main-event talent. In a sense, he was elevated to that level because he forced Cactus Jack into retirement. Triple-H has taken loads of abuse over the past year. What are your thoughts on him as Raw champion?

FOLEY: I think he's had several unfortunate occurrences. That leg injury really cut off his tag team push with "Stone-Cold." When he returned, his babyface push really was never



When last seen in a wrestling ring before June 9 of this year, Foley was serving as commissioner of the promotion. He might have been the most entertaining man ever to fill an on-air executive role.

After retiring from active competition, Mick got a chance to spend more time enjoying some of the finer things in life, including amusement park rides. He has filled the creative void mostly by writing.

Although he seemed a little apprehensive about stepping back into the "Hell In A Cell" cage that helped make him famous, his presence in the Triple-H-Kevin Nash main event at Bad Blood was definitely a plus.

FOLEY: The original idea came from watching a movie called *Affliction,* starring James Coburn and Nick Nolte. Coburn's character was mesmerizing, but just outright evil. I had the idea to write a story about a father and son, where the father has that very evil core. In creating the father, I've come up with a really original character with a lot of depth. I think fans of wrestling and of literature will find him an engrossing character. In the story, the father leaves his son up for adoption at a young age but comes back into his life suddenly. It may seem rather dark and depressing, but I think it is ultimately uplifting. It's also jam-packed with the trademark Foley sophomoric humor and perversion.

MURPHY: How is *Tietam Brown* connected to pro wrestling?

FOLEY: Tietam Brown, the father, is a former wrestler. I based his character on some of the great but bitter wrestlers who opened the way, people I've met in the business. He wrestled in the segregated South and was a pioneer in desegregating wrestling. He went from being a very good person and changed. He now lives a more shallow, guarded life. I talked to some of the guys I know, like Harley Race, Terry Funk, and Robert Fuller, to get insight into his character, and talked to William Regal about the old English wrestling tradition. I think wrestling fans will enjoy it.

MURPHY: I've written a few books myself, both fiction and nonfiction. How did you find going from writing nonfiction with your previous two books to fully realized. I think being handed that title really hurt his career because the fans saw him as someone who didn't deserve the belt. And I have to make a correction on something you said. People always think that I helped make Triple-H. I think he made me by letting me go out the way I wanted to go out—as Cactus Jack instead of a goofball with a sweat sock on his hand.

MURPHY: Have you had the opportunity to catch any NWA-TNA or Ring of Honor?

FOLEY: I hate to say it, but no, I haven't. Maybe that makes me less of a fan than I used to be, but I've got four kids and a busy life these days. I sincerely hope they do well. Any success is good for all of us.

MURPHY: Tell me about your new book, *Tietam Brown.*

tackling fiction? How long did it take to write this book?

FOLEY: It wasn't hard to write at all. I think that's because I came up with the idea a good year before I ever started putting it down on paper, and I had it all put together in my head. Unlike the autobiographies, fiction needs to make sense. It needs structure. I think the hardest part was finishing the first draft and realizing how many edits and rewrites I still had to make.

MURPHY: Was it difficult for you to sell a book of fiction? I know both *Have A Nice Day* and *Foley Is Good* went to number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list, but as far as adult fiction goes, you're still an unproven author. Was it hard to overcome the dumb wrestler stereotype?

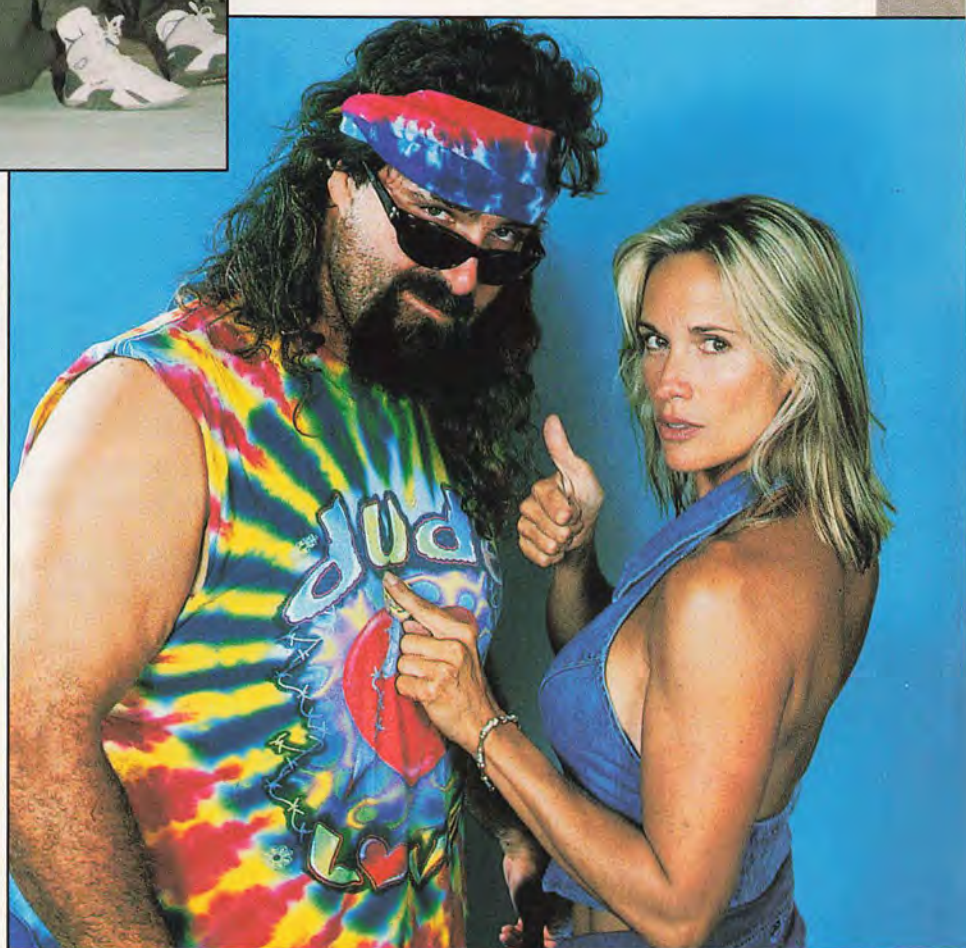
FOLEY: It's funny. My editor for this book had never heard of me before and had never seen me. The first time we talked on the phone, she had a copy of my bio and she said, "I'm looking at a picture of a big, scraggly haired guy missing a few teeth. Is that really you?" Yup, that's the author. But other than that, no one really had a problem with it. I think the book can stand on its own merits.

MURPHY: Earlier you mentioned the "gift of popularity" you've been given. There's no doubt you were—are—one of the most beloved wrestlers in WWE history. Have you thought about what made the Mankind character so endearing?

FOLEY: In 1998, the Mankind character struck a chord with people. The show was geared to cutting-edge, cool, and hip storylines. There was a huge opening for someone who wasn't cool or hip in the least. I knew I wasn't cool. I think the fans saw enough of the real Mick Foley behind the character, and they identified with it. I cornered the market in likeability.

MURPHY: Because of your books and your appearance in Barry Blaustein's movie *Beyond The Mat,* wrestling fans have gotten acquainted both with you and your family. I think people would want to know how the Foley clan is doing these days.

FOLEY: Things are really good here. All the kids are doing great. My son's baseball game for this afternoon was rained out, so he's running around here right now. Honestly, I regret that my wife and kids were put in the spotlight, because they never really signed up for that. I was actually incorporating them into storylines before the books, back in 1991. Wrestling is so important to me on a personal level that I couldn't help but bring in references to my personal



He was advised against involving his family in his career, but Foley couldn't help it. Wife Collette appeared on a cover of *The Wrestler* with Mick in a photo similar to this one in 1998 (right). And who could forget the reaction of his terrified children as they watched one of his ultraviolent matches with The Rock (above)?

Mankind's popularity really exploded after that unforgettable "Hell In A Cell" match with The Undertaker (left). Less than a year later, he was proudly holding the WWF World title belt that meant so much to him (above).

life, including my family. A bunch of the old-timers warned me to keep my family out of business, but that just wasn't who I was. I feel bad that my kids are always going to be remembered for crying during my match against The Rock (as depicted in *Beyond The Mat).*

MURPHY: Now that a couple of years have gone by, do you feel the depiction of you in *Beyond The Mat* was fair?

FOLEY: I think Barry Blaustein was very fair. He was worried that people would see that part of the film and get an image of me as being a really bad father, and he was very sensitive to that. That's why I was happy when he came back and filmed my reaction to those scenes. By coming back and showing the reaction I had to my family's reaction, I think that helped me in people's eyes. From what people have told me, they didn't think I was a bad father. They just thought I was someone who isn't perfect. I think Barry did a very good job with that film.

MURPHY: Because of your famous Dude Love home movie, you've become a patron saint to backyard wrestlers everywhere.

FOLEY: That's really a shame.

MURPHY: I don't mean to accuse you. Like a lot of kids, I had wrestling

"EVEN WHEN I RETIRED, I THINK THE ASSUMPTION WAS THAT I'D BE BACK FOR ONE OR TWO MATCHES A YEAR. BUT THEY HAVE TO MAKE SENSE STORYLINE-WISE, AND I HAVE TO BE IN SHAPE TO PULL IT OFF. I DON'T WANT TO RUIN THE LEGACY OF MANKIND. I'M NOT READY NOW. IT WOULD TAKE AT LEAST TWO OR THREE MONTHS, IF NOT MORE."

matches in the backyard when I was young. We just didn't build a ring or cut ourselves open or things like that. What are your thoughts on what backyard wrestling has become?

FOLEY: To some extent, I guess I am guilty of making backyard wrestling what it is, though I never intended for that to happen. You wrestled as a kid, just like I did. That doesn't mean we were selling videotapes of it or hawking it on the Web. I think I struck a chord because kids look at guys like The Rock, "Stone-Cold," and Triple-H, and those guys are superheroes. Most kids will never have those kinds of bodies. They looked at me, and I looked like I should be fixing refrigerators. They identified with me. I wish these kids would take a good, hard look—and a good, hard *read* of my books. I worked hard to learn how to wrestle. All the hardcore stuff was something I added later. You have to learn how to do the little things well before you should be worried about chair shots.

MURPHY: You made the comeback as a referee at Bad Blood, and you've taken a few bumps on *Raw* as well already.

FOLEY: *(Laughs)* More than I was expecting to, actually.

MURPHY: And you're feeling better. Do you still have a few more matches left in you?

FOLEY: Even when I retired, I think the assumption was that I'd be back for one or two matches a year. But they have to make sense storyline-wise, and I have to be in shape to pull it off. I don't want to ruin the legacy of Mankind. I'm not ready now. It would take at least two or three months, if not more. If the right situation came up, I'd certainly consider it. I've given some thought to wrestling at WrestleMania XX. One of my biggest regrets is not being able to have a match against Vince McMahon at WrestleMania X7 in 2001, because I think we could have pulled off a great one. We'll see how it goes.

MURPHY: Mick, thank you for your time. It's always a pleasure talking to you.

FOLEY: Thank you, Dan. □

Foley is quick to point that he doesn't believe he "made" Triple-H, referring to the widely held notion that it was his unselfishness that turned "The Game" into a main-eventer. He thanks Hunter for letting him go out the way he wanted to go out.

Any fan of Foley has an idea of how much pain he endured on his road to becoming a true superstar. His face was left bloody at the end of many a match. But he told some WWE wrestlers recently that a lot of the pain does go away in time.

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Aug. 1980: The Reign Of Bloodshed Begins: Stevens & Valentine Win The NWA Tag Team Title! Also: Kerry Von Erich, Backlund & Skaaland, Nick Bockwinkel, Zbyszko-Bruno, Keirn-Muraco, Samoans, Wrestling II-Idol.

June 1981: Bruno Sammartino: "I Want To Break Stan Hansen's Neck!" Also: Ted DiBiase, Garea & Martel, Mike Graham, Mongolian Stomper, Piper-Superstar, Verne Gagne, Tommy Rich.

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Oct. 1981: Is The Funk Family At War? Why Terry Funk And Dory Funk Jr. Were Forced To Wrestle. Also: Backlund-Patterson-Mosca, Harley Race, Rhodes-Khan, Kevin Sullivan, Flair-Patera, Verne Gagne.

Jan. 1982: Rich vs. Masked Superstar: Can Tommy Rich Survive As Georgia's Last Hero? Also: Kiwis, Bockwinkel-Atlas, Mascaras-Steamboat, Sullivan-Taylor, Bruno Sammartino.

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July 1982: Harley Race—His Destiny Is In The Hands Of Tommy Rich. Also: Rick Steamboat, Chief Jay Strongbow, Buzz Sawyer, Ric Flair, Roddy Piper.

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Aug. 1985: Ten Days Of Blood And Glory: The Road Warriors Invade Japan! Also: Terry Taylor, Magnum T.A., Bugsy McGraw, Sheik & Volkoff-Windham & Rotundo, 20th anniversary.

Oct. 1985: David Shultz Gets An NWA Title Shot: Ric Flair—"I Wrestle The Men Hulk Hogan Is Afraid Of!" Also: Misty Blue, Rick Martel, Kendall Windham, George Steele, Killer Brooks, all-time top 10.

May 1986: Von Erich Family Feud: Is Lance Coming Between Kevin And Kerry? Also: Hansen-Hall, Hillbillies-Beefcake & Valentine, Butch Reed, Santana-Ventura.

June 1986: Kerry Reveals His Secret: "I've Told Magnum T.A. How To Beat Ric Flair!" Also: Steve Williams, Hogan-Orton, Flair-Bockwinkel, Lex Luger.

Nov. 1986: Morton & Gibson Take A Trip To Badstreet U.S.A.: The Rock 'n' Roll Express vs. The Freebirds. Also: Eddie Gilbert, Hogan-Orndorff, Mike Von Erich, Mulligan-Bass.

Dec. 1986: Ric Flair's NWA Title Reign: Last Chance To Silence The Critics! Also: Nikita Koloff, Gilbert & Sting, Hogan-Piper, Abdullah-Adams, Nick Bockwinkel.

Jan. 1987: Bobby Heenan's Bitter Crusade To Destroy Hulk Hogan. Also: Borne & Sawyer, Garvins, Ted DiBiase, Misty Blue Simmes.

Feb. 1987: Tragedy Strikes Wrestling: Magnum T.A. Needs Your Prayers Now More Than Ever. Also: Roberts-Steamboat, Crusher Yurkof, Terry Gordy, Wendell Cooley.

March 1987: Ivan & Khrushchev's Kremlin Orders: Crush Nikita Koloff's Russian Revolution! Also: Barry Windham, One Man Gang, Brian Adias, Savage-Steamboat, Jimmy Snuka.

June 1987: The Hart Foundation vs. The Can-Ams: Special Analysis Of This WWF Superfeud! Also: Nick Bockwinkel, Paul Orndorff, Rhodes & Murdoch, Steve Williams.

July 1987: Missy Hyatt: Will She Kiss And Tell In The WWF? Also: Chris Adams, Hart Foundation, Luger & Horsemen, Nikita-Cornette, Stan Hansen.

Sept. 1987: Independence Day! Also: Hennig-Bockwinkel, Hart Foundation, Koloffs, Bubba Rogers, Missy Hyatt.

Oct. 1987: The Honky Tonk Man Wins The Intercontinental Title: Is Randy Savage The Fans' Last Hope. Also: Kerry Von Erich, Ken Patera, Sting-Gilbert, Horsemen-Freebirds, Zbyszko-Gagne.

Dec. 1987: Hulk Hogan: Will He Be Drowned By The New Wave Of Challengers? Also: Hennig-Lawler, Windham-Steiner, Flair-Williams, Brutus Beefcake, Ronnie Garvin.

Jan. 1988: The Experts Agree: The Road Warriors Will Turn Bad In 1988! Also: Koloff-Taylor, Curt Hennig, Duggan-DiBiase.

Feb. 1988: Ric Flair Admits: "I'm Nothing Without The NWA Belt!" Also: Kerry Von Erich, Jim Cornette, Hogan-Andre, Hennig-Lawler, Terry Taylor.

March 1988: After Four Years As Champion ... Only Hulk Hogan Can Beat Hulk Hogan. Also: Warriors-Demolition, Steve Williams, Luger & Dillon, Calgary, Terry Gordy.

May 1988: Belt Or No Belt ... Hulk Hogan Is Still The People's Champion! Also: Owen Hart, Tatum & Victory, Scott Hall, Madusa Miceli, Luger-Arn.

June 1988: How Sting's War With Ric Flair Could Make Him A Horseman! Also: Bobby Heenan, Martel-Zenk, Kerry-Gordy, Ted DiBiase, Nikita Koloff.

Aug. 1988: World Tag Title Power Shift! Also: Windham & Luger, Demolition, Taylor-Freebirds, Paul Ellering, Owen & Bret.

Oct. 1988: The Fantastics Declare: "We Will Not Share Our Fans With The Rock 'n' Roll Express!" Also: Rhodes-Windham, Curt Hennig, Roberts-Rude, Rougeaus, Jim Garvin.

Jan. 1989: The Horsemen Destroyed! The World Title Gained! But The Midnight Express Must Still Prove Themselves! Also: Top Guns, Hart & Rougeaus, Andre-Savage-Hulk, Terry Gordy, Kevin Von Erich.

March 1989: Scared Stiff! "Don't Say Snake!" Also: Jeff Jarrett, Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Bam Bam Bigelow, Hercules, Iron Sheik.

April 1989: Hulkamania Runs Wild Again! Can Randy Savage Stop The Onslaught? Also: British Bulldogs, Road Warriors-Sting & Luger, Lawler-Kerry, Andre, Mike Rotundo.

June 1989: Ultimate Warrior's Mission Impossible: Destroy Randy Savage For Hulk Hogan. Also: Rick Steamboat, Rick Martel, Larry Zbyszko, Luger-Windham by Sting, Ric Flair.

July 1989: Dino Bravo: The Man Hulk Hogan Cannot Beat! Also: Flair-Steamboat, Rhodes & Perez, Road Warriors & Ellering, Michael Hayes.

Aug. 1989 (Special Issue): Supercard Sunday! Exclusive Coverage Of WrestleMania V And Clash Of Champions VI. Also: Kerry-Embry, Randy Savage, Great Muta, Ted DiBiase, Teddy Long.

Sept. 1989: Our Urgent Plea To Ric Flair: Don't Wrestle Terry Funk. Also: Demolition, Roddy Piper, Hogan-Zeus, Larry Zbyszko, Jerry Lawler.

Oct. 1989: No Holds Barred! Hogan & Beefcake vs. Savage & Zeus: An Exclusive Preview & Analysis. Also: Eric Embry, Four Horsemen, Teddy Long, Hayes-Luger, Art Barr, Billy Jack Haynes.

Nov. 1989: Roddy Piper Pins Randy Savage ... And Hulk Hogan Is Scared Stiff! Also: Mr. T & Von Erichs, Garvin & Hayes, Flair-T. Funk, Dustin-Steel Man, Sgt. Slaughter.

Jan. 1990: The Hulk Hogan Book Of Lists. Also: Brian Pillman, Rich-Luger, Tully & Arn, P.Y. Chu-Hi, Greg Gagne.

March 1990: Funk-Flair: "I Quit!—One War Ends, Two More Begin. Also: Nikita Koloff, Survivor Series, Steiners, Hogan-Zeus, Jim Cornette.

April 1990: Hulk Hogan: A Decade Of Greatness. Also: Luger-Flair, Woman, Piper-Heenan, Billy Travis, Badd Company.

July 1990: My 10 Challenges To Ric Flair, By Lex Luger. Also: Lanny Poffo, Dusty-Savage, Luger-Flair, Doom, Tully Blanchard.

Aug. 1990: Hogan-Warrior II: You Can Make It Happen. Also: Eric Embry, Demolition, Doom, Larry Zbyszko.

Sept. 1990: The Ultimate Warrior Wimps Out! Why He Won't Wrestle Hulk Hogan. Also: Billy Jack Haynes, Lex Luger, Doom-Steiners, Tugboat, Kerry-Borne.

Oct. 1990: Hulk Hogan vs. Earthquake: Exclusive SummerSlam Preview & Analysis. Also: Ultimate Warrior, Ric Flair, Tommy Rich, Tasmanian Devil, Chris Von Erich.

Feb. 1991: The Incredible "Halloween Havoc Hoax"! Unraveling The Diabolical Plot. Also: Muta-Steamboat, Hogan-Hart, Ultimate Warrior, Cornette & Express, Norman.

March 1991: Warning To The Ultimate Warrior: Roddy Piper Wants You! Also: Gilbert-Jarrett, Cornette & Express, Teddy Long, Survivor Series, Scott Norton.

April 1991: Hulk Hogan: The Challenges That Remain. Also: Ted DiBiase, Skyscrapers, Lex Luger, Tom Zenk, Fabulous Ones.

May 1991: Only Hulk Hogan Can Rid The WWF Of The Stench Of Sgt. Slaughter. Also: Ric Flair, Bobby Eaton, Sheik-Brazil, Power & Glory, Terry Funk.

June 1991: How Much Longer Can We Depend On Hulk Hogan? Also: Nasty Boys, Sting, Flair-Gigante, Cactus Jack, Kevin Von Erich.

July 1991: Can Ric Flair Shatter The "Myth" Of Japanese Superiority? Also: Embry & Prichard, LOD-Nastys, Steiners, Savage & Elizabeth.

Aug. 1991: If Sgt. Slaughter Said "I'm Sorry" ... Would Hulk And The World Forgive Him? Also: Luger-Nikita, Hennig-Davey Boy, Lanny Poffo, Bam Bam Bigelow.

Nov. 1991: Lex Luger Wins The Title—But Loses His Fans. Also: Rick Steamboat, Roddy Piper, Global, Diamond Studd, Lawler-Embry.

Dec. 1991: Roddy Piper's Exclusive Analysis: Flair vs. Hogan—Who Will Win The Match Of The Century? Also: Sting, 25 greatest teams, Beverly, Cactus Jack.

Jan. 1992: The LOD's Championship Catastrophe: Overpowered By The Natural Disasters. Also: Johnny B. Badd, Mr. Hughes, Jake Roberts, Ronnie Gossett.

Feb. 1992: Shocking WWF Report: McMahon Offers Bounty On Flair—Will Vince Pay The Piper? Also: Ron Simmons, Tito Santana, Bob Backlund, R. Steiner-Abdullah.

March 1992: After Survivor Series & Tuesday In Texas: Has The WWF Title Suffered Irreparable Damage? Also: Brian Pillman, Anderson & Bruiser, Rude-Sting, Mountie-Hart, Jeff Jarrett.

April 1992: After A Year Of Tragedy & Turmoil: The Magic Is Back In WCW! Also: Chris Candido, Paul Orndorff, Lady X, Paul Bearer, Hennig & Flair, Michaels & Jannetty.

Dec. 1992: He's *Baaaaaack!* Jake Roberts Slithers Into WCW. Also: Paul E. Dangerously, Ron Simmons, Hulk Hogan, Michaels-Martel, Gilberts-Rock 'n' Rolls.

May 1992: He Rumbled Past 29 Men ... Ric Flair's Hour Of Power: Can One Man Stop Him At WrestleMania VIII? Also: Anderson & Eaton, Roddy Piper, Dusty Rhodes, USWA, Don Owen.

June 1992: In Ric Flair's High-Stakes Championship Game, Hulk Hogan & Sid Justice Are Mere Pawns. Also: Eddie Gilbert, Ultimate Warrior, Vinnie Vegas, WCW titles, Koko B. Ware.

July 1992: "Number Two Just Won't Do": For Rick Rude, The U.S. Belt Means Failure. Also: Madusa, Gorilla Monsoon, LOD, Nurse Vanessa, Greg Valentine, Sabu.

Aug. 1992: The Ultimate Warrior: WrestleMania's Accidental Hero. Also: Bunkhouse matches, Undertaker-Roberts, Sting, JYD, Rob Van Dam.

Sept. 1992: Hey, Legion Of Doom—Go For The Title Or Go Away! Also: Repo-Crush, Mondo Kleen, Freebirds-Valentine & Taylor, Dangerous Alliance, Moondogs.

Oct. 1992: British Bulldog & Ultimate Warrior: Why They'll Be Crowned At SummerSlam. Also: Scotty Flamingo, Brian Lee, Martel-Tatanka, Steve Austin, Sting.

Nov. 1992: WWF Beware! It's The Perfect Time For A Curt Hennig Comeback! Also: Crush, Butch Reed, Sting, Buddy Rogers, Dan Spivey.

Jan. 1993: Sting Turns Sadistic: "Hurting Jake Makes Me Happy!" Also: Anderson & Eaton, Bushwhackers-Moondogs, Ramon-Savage, Natural Disasters, Masa Chono.

Feb. 1993: WWF Champion Bret Hart: His Five Most Dangerous Challenges. Also: Sgt. Slaughter, Steve Austin, Rick Steiner, Bob Backlund, Terry Taylor.

March 1993 (Special Edition): 1992—The Year In Pictures. Also: Madusa-Paul E., Curt Hennig, Davey Boy Smith, Jesse Ventura, Predictions For '93.

April 1993 What's In? What's Out? Also: Razor Ramon, Rick Steamboat, Patriot, Tatanka, Brian Christopher.

May 1993: Sumo Sadism: Will Yokozuna Make His Biggest Splash At WrestleMania? Also: Jim Cornette, Christopher-Jarrett, Benoit-Scorpio, Windham & Rhodes, Hennig-Luger.

Nov. 1993: Bret Hart vs. Lex Luger: It's Not Over Yet! Also: Rude-Dustin, Hulk Hogan, Marty Jannetty, Heavenly Bodies, Tatanka, Sherri Martel.

Jan. 1994: Roasted, Broiled, Fried, Baked ... Any Way You Cook It, Hogan's A Chicken! Also: Rude-Flair, Bagwell & Scorpio, Jim Cornette, Jerry Lawler, Hansen & T. Funk-Abdullah & Sullivan.

May 1994: Aftershocks! How The Royal Rumble Shook Up WrestleMania. Also: Hulk Hogan, Boss, Douglas-Sherri, Patriot, improve WCW.

July 1994: Ric Flair vs. Hulk Hogan: We Preview The Inevitable Battle. Also: Dreamer-Snuka, Jim Crockett's WWN, Ted DiBiase, Shane Douglas, Terra Ryzing.

Aug. 1994: Bret's Nightmare Team Becomes A Reality: Owen Hart & Yokozuna. Also: Cactus-Vader, MOM, Flair-Badd, Nasty Boys, Luna Vachon.

Sept. 1994 (Special Issue): WWF Midyear Report! Also: Big Van Vader, Parker-Hollywood Blonds, Sting-Rude, WWF legal problems, Prince Kharis, Bunkhouse-Rhodes, Public Enemy.

Jan. 1995: Our Holiday Wish List For 1995. Also: Johnny B. Badd, DiBiase-Tatanka, Bob Backlund, PG-13, Hacksaw Duggan.

March 1995 (Special Issue): 1994—The Year In Pictures. Also: Sullivan-Hogan-Sullivan, WWF '95-WWF '85, Ric Flair, MOM, 911.

April 1995: Imagine Wrestling Today If ... Also: Gunn & Smothers, Harlem Heat, Money Inc., Lawler-Cornette.

May 1994: Aftershocks! How The Royal Rumble Shook Up WrestleMania. Also: Big Bossman, Sherri-Douglas, Hulk Hogan, The Patriot.

July 1995: Hulk Hogan's Contract With America. Also: Marty Jannetty, Brian Pillman, Lawrence Taylor, Bill Dundee.

Oct. 1995: President Backlund?! Also: Steiners, Austin & Pillman, Miss Texas, Gordon Solie.

Nov. 1995: If Savage Can't Silence Flair, He's Through! Also: Jarrett-Ramon, Mabel, Hogan & Renegade, WWF legends roundtable.

Dec. 1995 (Special Issue): Shawn Michaels: Too Good To Be Second Best! Also: Wrestling rulebook, Vega-Ramon, Mama Cornette, Kamala-Duggan, Big Van Vader.

Winter 1995: Exclusive Preview: Sting vs. Hogan: This Time It's For Real! Also: Steiners, Yankem-Undertaker, Bodies-Cornette, Arn Anderson.

May 1996: WWF In-Vader! Can Bret, Shawn, & Razor Play The Pain Game? Also: Public Enemy, Steve Austin, wrestling oddities, Kensuke Sasaki, Ric Flair.

June 1996 (Special Issue): Fear Of Height! How The Giant Is Paralyzing Wrestling. Also: Shock 'n' Wrestling, Razor Ramon, Brian Pillman, Konnan.

Aug. 1996: Shawn Michaels: Finally—He Has The Title ... Now Here's What He's Gotta Do With It! Also: Public Enemy-Nastys, Bret Hart, Booty Man-Sullivan, Mabel.

Sept. 1996 (Special Issue): WWF Midyear Report. Also: Savio Vega, Sabu-Scorpio, Chris Benoit, Goldust, Olympians, Giant.

Oct. 1996: Muscling Back To The Top: The Warrior Is Ready To Rule Again. Also: Warriors & Sasaki-Steiners & Norton, Razor & Diesel, Mabel & Mo, Blue Meanie.

Nov. 1996: Brian Pillman: Next WWF Champ! Also: Giant-Sting, Ray Stevens, Dick Murdoch, Cloudy, John Tenta, WCW shuffle.

Dec. 1996 (Special Issue): WWF vs. WCW: Top 10 Faceoff! Also: Ahmed Johnson, Ric Flair, Mero & Sable, Goldust, Sandman.

Holiday 1996: WCW Shocker: Randy Savage Is Set To Join Hulk Hogan's NWO! Also: Steve Austin, Michaels-Goldust, Arn Anderson, Van Dam-Sabu, Steve Williams.

Jan. 1997: It Could Happen! Hogan's Next Move ... Buy WCW! Also: Undertaker, New Jack, Owen-Bulldog, Ted DiBiase.

Feb. 1997: Wrestling's Top Stars: What 1997 Has In Store For Them! Also: Michaels-Hart, Pit Bull I, Rey Misterio Jr., Kevin Nash.

July 1997: Infighting, Politics, Egos: Is The NWO Losing Its Edge? Also: WWF-ECW, Dean Malenko, Super 8 tourney, Jerry Lawler.

Oct. 1997: Bret Hart & Shawn Michaels: How Low Will They Go? Also: Paul E. Dangerously, DDP & Kimberly, Rhodes family, Keiji Muto.

Nov. 1997: 10-Year Grudge! Lex Luger's Career Ruined By J.J. Dillon? Also: Shawn-Bret, Jeff Jarrett, Hunter Hearst Helmsley, Dreamer-Raven, Dan Severn.

Dec. 1997 (Special Issue): WWF vs. WCW: Top 10 Faceoff! Also: Guerreros, Taz, Syxx, Paul Bearer, Brian Christopher.

Hol. 1997: First Owen ... Then 'Taker ... Then Hogan: Who's Gonna Go Next? Also: Steve Austin, Bret Hart, Lex Luger, Ric Flair, Dean Malenko.

April 1998: "We've Won!" Maybe ... But Can The NWO Handle Its Own Success? Also: Ken Shamrock, Steiners-Warriors, Douglas & Francine, Rocky Maivia.

May 1998: Mike Tyson: Stepping Into Wrestling Hell! Also: Bischoff-Bret-Zbyszko, Meng & Barbarian, Hunter Hearst Helmsley, ECWA ladder match.

June 1998: Hollywood Hogan: 10 More Dirty Deeds ... And Then He's Outta Here! Also: DeGeneration X, Jim Cornette, Randy Savage, yesterday and today.

July 1998: Death Wish! Costing Hogan The Title Isn't Enough For The Macho Man: What's Next? Also: Ric Flair, Headbangers-Rock 'n' Rolls, Chris Chetti, Mero & Sable.

Aug. 1998: We Stand Behind Ya, Vince! It's Time To Fire Austin. Also: Luna-Sable, Randy Savage, Dean Malenko, Super 8 tourney.

Sept. 1998 (Special Issue): WWF Midyear Report. Also: Nash-Hogan, Rocky Maivia, Bill Goldberg, Antonio Inoki.

Oct. 1998: The Mother Of All Pay-Per-Views! A WWF-WCW Supercard Is No Longer Just Talk! Also: Sable, Undertaker, Randy Savage, Sabu & Van Dam.

Nov. 1998: Demons Be Damned! Sting Makes The Giant See Red! Also: McMahon-Dude, Jarrett-Blackman, Melanie Pillman, Rey Misterio Jr.

Dec. 1998 (Special Issue): WWF vs. WCW: Top 10 Faceoff! Also: ECW midyear report, Ric Flair, Kane.

Hol. 1998: "Quit, Mick!" A Desperate Plea From A Distraught Wife. Also: Chris Jericho, Jason Sensation, wrestlers vs. celebrities, hardcore war.

Jan. 1999: Stone-Cold's Personal Survivor Series. Also: Rock-HHH, NWA, Bret Hart, Howard Finkel, three-way title matches.

Feb. 1999: Hot Rocks! The Anger That Drives Shamrock & The Rock. Also: McMahon-Austin, Spike Dudley, Eric Bischoff, Perry Saturn.

March 1999 (Special Issue): 1998—The Year In Pictures. Also: Hall & Nash, Goldust, Mr. Ooh La La, The Undertaker.

April 1999: Hogan's Retirement: White House Or White Lie? Also: DDP-Hart, Taz-Douglas, Steve Austin, Mankind.

May 1999: Team Coverage: The NWO Reunion! Also: Kane-McMahon, Dallas Page, Funk-Abdullah, WWF sideshow.

June 1999 (Special Issue): Ric Flair: The 10 Feats He Must Accomplish Before He's Through. Also: Rocky Maivia, Juventud Guerrera, Billy Gunn, body parts quiz section.

July 1999: Our Bottom Line ... It's High Time Austin Shows McMahon Respect! Also: Jerry Lawler, Rey Misterio Jr., Ken Shamrock, DDP-Bigelow-Goldberg.

Aug. 1999: This Man Is Pure Evil! Trust Hogan And He'll Take You To Hell! Plus: Owen Hart, Vader, Sable.

Sept. 1999 (Special Issue): WWF Midyear Report. Also: DDP-Sting, Douglas-Credible, Big Show-McMahons, Disco Inferno, Keirn & Lane.

Oct. 1999: Shawn Michaels' Game Of Corporate Chess! Are The McMahons His Pawns? Also: Steiners, Billy Gunn, Savage & George.

Nov. 1999: Austin's New Powers: Shag Vince? Yeah, Baby! Also: Arn-Sid, Hardy Boys, Ernest Miller, Naoya Ogawa.

Dec. 1999 (Special Issue): WWF vs. WCW: Top 10 Faceoff! Also: ECW midyear report, David & Ric Flair, Test & Stephanie.

Hol. 1999: Before The WWF Can Sell ... Read What They Had To Tell! Also: Kanyon, Big Show, Spike & Mahoney-Axl & New Jack, Kevin Nash.

Jan. 2000: An Insider's Analysis: Why The Guys Can't Handle Chyna. Also: Revolution, ECW expansion, Guerrero & Misterio, WWF/WCW/ECW women.

Feb. 2000: When Will Mankind Finally Tell The Rock ... "Put A Sock In It"? Also: Goldberg, Chris Jericho, Sabu, Harlem Heat.

Apr. 2000: Can The WWF Survive Without Steve Austin? Also: Dawn Marie-Francine, Meng, Big Show, Madusa.

May 2000: StePHONY: The Most Mistrusted McMahon Of All! Also: Harlem Heat & Midnight, David & Ric Flair, Kurt Angle, Rhino.

June 2000 (Special Issue): The Rock: No. 1 On The Jabroni Hit List! Also: Awesome-Van Dam, Kurt Angle, Vampiro, federation jumpers, book of lists.

July 2000: Tori/Torrie, What's The Story? How They Rank In 10 Crucial Categories. Also: Big Show, Tank Abbott, Too Cool, Rhodes-Dreamer, Jeff Jarrett.

Aug. 2000: We're Con-Vinced! This Attack Saved The WWF! Also: Lex Luger, Radicals, Sandman & Rhino, Cyrus.

Sept. 2000 (Special Issue): WWF Mid-Year Report. Also: Mike Awesome, Nova & Chetti, Paul Wight, Chyna, Dr. Sam Sheppard.

Oct. 2000: Is Chyna Robbing Eddie Of His Latino Heat? Also: Abbott-Steiner, Scotty Too Hotty, Rob Van Dam, David Flair.

Nov. 2000: Special Fear Issue—Rock-Benoit, Ric Flair, HBK. Also: ECW mid-year report, Bill Goldberg.

Dec. 2000 (Special Issue): WWF vs. WCW: Top 10 Faceoff! Also: Goldberg-Triple-H, Daffney, Christian & Edge, Jeff Peterson.

(ALL-COLOR BEGINNING WITH THE JANUARY 2001 ISSUE)

Jan. 2001: WWF Brat-titude! Does Steph Always Get Her Way? Not On Your Life! Also: Lance Storm, Mick Foley, Goldberg, Steve Corino, Steve Blackman, Torrie Wilson.

March 2001: Triple-H & The Rock: 10 Reasons They Should Trust Each Other ... 10 Reasons They Should Not! Also: Scott Steiner, Chris Candido, Rob Van Dam, McMahon-ECW, Steven Richards, WCW factions.

May 2001: Do Anything You Want, Stone-Cold: We Can't Hate You. Also: Kronic, Rikishi, Steve Corino, Goldberg, Edge & Christian, Kane.

July 2001: Jerichoholics Beware! Serious Withdrawal Symptoms Are In Store! Also: Tajiri, Steph-Test, Undertaker, Mike Awesome, WCW Elite, Albert.

Sept. 2001: The Rock's Choice: Honor Over Glory! Also: WrestleMania X-Seven, Undertaker-Triple-H, Shane-WCW, TCL II, Scott Hall, Vince McMahon, Chris Jericho.

Nov. 2001: Goldberg! Da Man Who Could Make Or Break Wrestling! Also: Dudleys, Steve Corino, Chris Benoit, Dusty Rhodes, Lita, WWF top tier.

Jan. 2002: Can The Rock Handle The Unrelenting Pressure Of Fame? Also: RVD, Paul Heyman, Terry Gordy, Flash-Jericho, Tajiri-Tazz, WWF-Alliance

March 2002: Outsiders Looking In! Hall & Nash Take Aim At The WWF! Also: Ivory, Austin-Angle, Christian-Edge, what's ahead in '02.

May 2002: Ric Flair: 10 Reasons He Terrifies Vince McMahon. Also: Undertaker, Jeff Hardy, Survivor Series, S.A.T., report cards.

July 2002: Hail The NWO ... But Don't Forget The N-W-Woes! Also: Edge, Billy & Chuck, Leviathon, Jericho-Flair, Goldust.

Sept. 2002: What's Left? Hulk Hogan's Five Remaining Tasks. Also: Steve Austin, Kurt Angle, Rey Misterio Jr., Jeff Peterson, WWF draft.

Nov. 2002: Who's Next? The Stars That Could Replace Stone-Cold. Also: Torrie Wilson, Davey Boy Smith, Ken Shamrock, Funk-Abdullah-Rhodes-Sullivan, WWE shockers, indy roulette.

Jan. 2003: War Games! WWE Is Out Of Control ... And Vinnie Mac Loves It! Also: Rey Misterio Jr., A.J. Styles, Rikishi-Gangrel, The Rock, Christian.

March 2003: The WrestleMania XIX We Want To See! Also: Terry Funk, Rey Misterio Jr., Nidia, NWA-TNA, what's ahead in '03.

May 2003: A Permanent Replacement For The Rock? Book It! Also: Smackdown, Joanie & Syxx-Pac, Raw report cards, Shawn Michaels, Victoria.

July 2003: In Tune With Steve Austin—A Comprehensive Guide To Stone-Cold's Red-Hot Comeback. Also: Kurt Angle, Amazing Red, The Sheik, Bill DeMott, Al Snow, Ric Flair.

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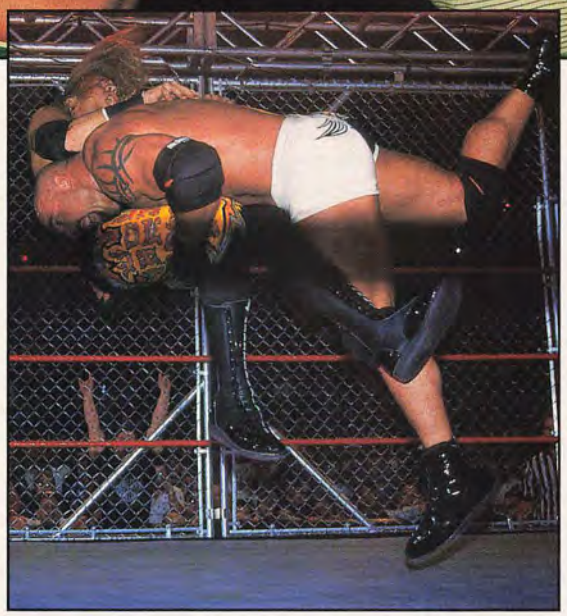
THE 2003 MID

IT WAS GOOD to get back to normal this year. For the most part, actual wrestlers dominated the headlines for the first six months of 2003—not stories of one company engulfing another (as with WWE's purchase of WCW in 2001), or of a giant company splitting into two (as with the WWE brand extension in 2002). With *PWI's* "Mid-Year Report," we hope to provide a comprehensive evaluation of pro wrestling, from January 1 to June 30, 2003.

Bill Goldberg's entry into WWE earned the top spot in our "*PWI* 50," which details the most important news stories of the half-year. But, if Goldberg's career soon fizzles out in WWE, then the number-two story—Steve Austin's retirement due to spinal injuries—could become the more significant news item over time. If there's a theme this year, it is the disturbing number of WWE stars, including Austin, Kurt Angle, and Edge, who have suffered neck and spinal damage.

Not surprisingly, most of the top stories concerned WWE, but there were other promotions that made headlines in the half-year. Vince Russo's formation of Sports Entertainment Xtreme, NWA champion Jeff Jarrett's victory over WWA champion Sting in a unification match followed by Sting's TNA debut, and an influx of former WWE stars all were important happenings that affected wrestling's second national promotion. Nick Dinsmore's capture of the Ohio Valley title, along with Ring of Honor's "Night Of Champions," also cracked

-YEAR REPORT



the "*PWI* 50." There were also some international headlines, including Kenta Kobashi's win over Mitsuharu Misawa for the Global Honored Crown, Shinya Hashimoto's All-Japan Triple Crown victory over Keiji Muto, and The Great Sasuke's election to the Japanese legislature.

Unfortunately, six deaths made our "*PWI* 50." The deaths of Curt Hennig and Elizabeth are included our top 10 because both were major stars not long ago, and neither died of natural causes. In addition, their deaths may stiffen the resolve of promoters and wrestlers alike to clean up the industry. Lex Luger's arrest for illegal drug possession, most notably anabolic steroids and other muscle-enhancing drugs found during the investigation of Elizabeth's death, could also have broad implications for the industry. The other deaths included those of Freddie Blassie, The Sheik, "Sailor" Art Thomas, and Tony Altimore. We're sure you'll enjoy reading about the careers of all four.

Besides the "*PWI* 50," we've included the top 10 moments from *Raw* and *Smackdown*, along with our rankings and analyses of the 20 best matches on WWE pay-per-view. In addition, we highlight those stars who have made the most important contributions during the first half of 2003 by selecting Wrestler, Tag Team, Most Popular Wrestler, and Most Hated Wrestler of the Half-Year winners. If your favorite doesn't make the cut, don't worry: We have also issued grades for nearly every major superstar.

So what does the rest of 2003 have to offer? We aren't sure, but that won't stop us from making some predictions regarding WWE, TNA, and wrestling as a whole. As you'll learn from reading this year's installment of "The Wacky & Weird," it's just about impossible to predict anything in this business. Who ever thought we'd see Goldberg wearing Goldust's wig?

TOP 50 STORIES OF

1. BILL GOLDBERG DEBUTS ON *RAW*

More than two years of speculation came to an end when Bill Goldberg appeared on the March 31 edition of *Raw,* the night after WrestleMania XIX. Negotiations had been ongoing for several months, but serious injuries to major stars and Goldberg's apparent willingness to work a busier schedule were the primary factors that sealed the deal.

On that edition of *Raw,* The Rock had just stated that he was off to Hollywood because he had satisfied every goal in his wrestling career, from reigning as a world champion to defeating Steve Austin at 'Mania. At that moment, Goldberg's entrance music was heard. Inside the ring, the former WCW World champion told The Rock that he hadn't really accomplished everything. The Rock had not yet faced "Da Man" himself. Said Goldberg: "So, Rock, you want to know who's next, eh? … *You're* next!" Then Goldberg leveled Rock with a devastating spear, setting up their historic encounter at Backlash.

"I got an e-mail from a guy whose brother died over in the [Iraqi] war," Goldberg told wwe.com later that night. "He got shot by a sniper. The kid was 19 years old and he lived, breathed, and ate Goldberg … So, for every kid that's walked up to me and asked why I'm coming back, for every kid that's e-mailed me on billgoldberg.com, and for everybody over there in the war and fighting and risking their lives to ensure our freedom, that's why I came back."

Goldberg's last match in North America had been at WCW's Sin in January 2001, when he and DeWayne Bruce lost to Buff Bagwell and Lex Luger in a tag team match that stipulated he would have to retire if his team lost. He did lose, and other than a few appearances with All-Japan, that was the last time Goldberg had been in action.

2. STEVE AUSTIN FORCED INTO RETIREMENT

When General Manager Eric Bischoff, brandishing a doctor's note on the March 31 edition of *Raw,* claimed that Steve Austin was a medical liability and would no longer be allowed to wrestle, many fans assumed it was just another storyline. Unfortunately, it wasn't. Despite a stepped up training regiment during his hiatus in 2002, Austin's nagging spinal injuries were making it impossible for "Stone-Cold" to continue his in-ring career.

But Bischoff's glee didn't last long. WWE CEO Linda McMahon later announced that Austin and Bischoff would share power as co-general managers of Raw. Many people still hoped the former WWE World champion could wrestle at least one dream match against Goldberg, who, ironically, debuted on the same edition of *Raw* in which Bischoff disclosed Austin's deteriorating physical condition.

Several weeks later, Austin confirmed that he would be consulting Dr. Hae-Dong Jho of Pittsburgh about undergoing experimental surgery that would involve reconstructing some of his vertebrae, instead of having more vertebrae fused together. Kurt Angle and "Brooklyn Brawler" Steve Lombardi had undergone similar surgery with Dr. Jho, with good results so far. Austin, however, stressed that he probably would never wrestle again and that the surgery would be done merely to curb further nerve damage.

Austin told wwe.com: "If I could get away with it and the circumstances are right, and everything was in order, would I try one more match? Yeah. But then again, on the other side, I've got to be Steve Williams (his real name). I've got to make the smart decision and look out for myself long term, my quality of life as I get older and older."

THE HALF-YEAR

3. LESNAR BEATS ANGLE FOR SMACKDOWN TITLE AT WRESTLEMANIA XIX

WWE teased a Kurt Angle-Brock Lesnar showdown ever since Angle beat The Big Show for the Smackdown title at Armageddon. But WWE might have teased that match for too long, because when WrestleMania XIX rolled around, it seemed a certainty that Angle—who had just been diagnosed with similar injuries as Steve Austin and Chris Benoit—would not be able to compete.

Only a couple of weeks before WrestleMania, Angle made the heroic (some would say foolish) decision to defend the Smackdown title against Lesnar in the WrestleMania main event. Never before had two such distinguished amateur grapplers—Angle, an Olympic gold medalist, and Lesnar, the 2000 NCAA heavyweight champion—met in a WWE ring in such a high-profile match.

The match began with the series of headlocks, armbars, and waistlocks one would expect from two classically trained stars. Lesnar tried to use his strength advantage over Angle, lifting the Smackdown champ high for a press-slam only five minutes into the match. Likewise, Angle countered Lesnar's F5 attempt with an anklelock followed by a half-Boston crab. Three minutes later, he used the Angle slam for a near-fall.

At the 20-minute mark, Lesnar climbed the turnbuckles and attempted to deliver a shooting star press, a move he had used successfully in OVW in the past, far across the ring. An exhausted Lesnar didn't make the flight and crashed head-first into the canvas. Incredibly, Lesnar managed to execute the F5 and pin Angle for his second Smackdown championship.

Frankly, the biggest surprise regarding this main event was that it was Lesnar, not Angle, who was rushed to the hospital following the match.

4. CURT HENNIG DIES AT 44

Second-generation star Curt Hennig was found dead on February 10 in his hotel room in Brandon, Florida. Hennig was slated to compete on a show promoted by Jimmy Hart that night. Several weeks later, the Tampa Medical Examiner's Office confirmed that acute cocaine intoxication was the cause of death.

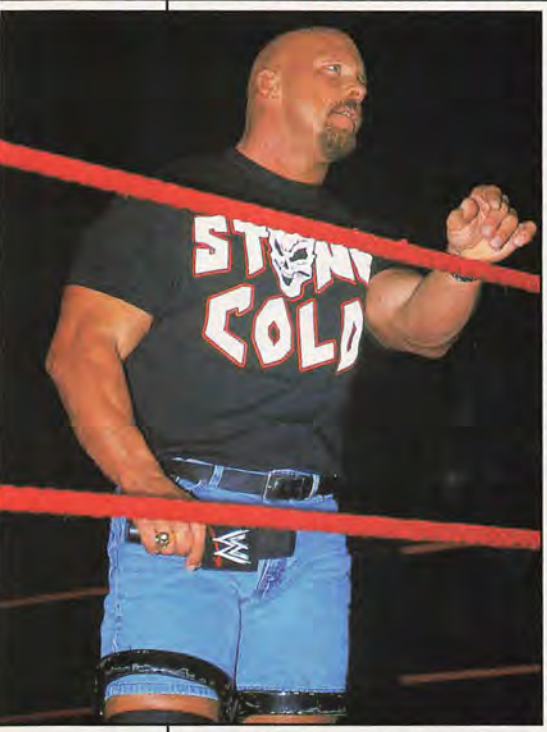
Curt was the son of Larry "The Ax" Hennig, and was an outstanding amateur wrestler at Robbinsdale High School in his native Minnesota. He defeated Billy Howard in his pro debut on January 30, 1980, and went on to become a popular preliminary wrestler in the WWF. He teamed with his father to capture the Pacific Northwest tag team title in 1982, and won the Pacific Northwest heavyweight belt in 1983.

Hennig's breakthrough match occurred on January 18, 1986, when he teamed with Scott Hall to defeat Jim Garvin and "Mr. Electricity" Steve Regal for the AWA World tag team title. In 1987, as the much cockier "Cool" Curt Hennig, he beat Nick Bockwinkel for the AWA World heavyweight title, and reigned for more than a year before losing to Jerry Lawler.

Then he reinvented himself as "Mr. Perfect" in the WWF, challenged for Hulk Hogan's World title, and won the Intercontinental strap on two occasions. Hennig retired due to a back injury in the early-1990s, but joined WCW as a full-time wrestler in 1997. There, he reigned as U.S. champ and had an entertaining run as leader of The West Texas Rednecks.

Hennig returned to WWE for the 2002 Royal Rumble, and his impressive performance earned him a permanent contract. An altercation with Brock Lesnar during a transatlantic flight prompted WWE to release him a few months later. Hennig is survived by his wife, Leonice, and four children, Jack, Amy, Kate, and Curtis.

5. STEVE AUSTIN MAKES WWE RETURN AT NO WAY OUT



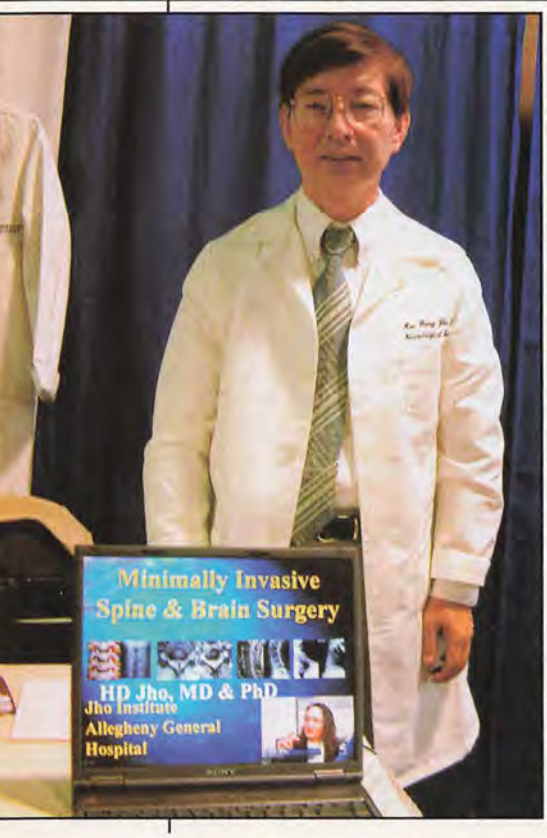
Vince McMahon had ordered General Manager Eric Bischoff to "grab Raw by the throat," and Bischoff, in turn, pressured Jim Ross to talk his good friend Steve Austin into returning to WWE. After weeks of teases, Austin's return was set for No Way Out. Furthermore, McMahon ordered Bischoff to battle "Stone-Cold" himself at the February 23 pay-per-view.

Austin, who had honed his physique into 265 pounds of muscle during his eight-month absence, attacked Bischoff with reckless abandon at the opening bell. Although Bischoff has a black belt in karate, that was of no use against "Stone-Cold," as Austin stomped a mud hole in the Raw general manager. The Montreal fans continued to give the former WWE World champion a huge ovation as he continued the assault. Austin executed two stunners and pinned Bischoff after four minutes of one-sided action. After the match, Austin gave him two more.

"Stone-Cold" described his homecoming during an interview with wwe.com: "I wouldn't say there's tension in the air, but I wouldn't say I'm completely relaxed. I don't think anybody's completely relaxed. But I'll say I'm glad to be back ... I'm getting a fine reception. There were a couple of people who either I pulled aside or they pulled me aside, and we kind of buried the hatchet with stuff that went on. Like I said, I did what I did, and so be it."

Austin had walked out of WWE shortly before an edition of *Raw* went on the air in June 2002. He acknowledged that personal issues, nagging injuries, and an overall dissatisfaction with the direction of his character prompted his walkout.

6. KURT ANGLE UNDERGOES SPINAL SURGERY



He defied his doctors' advice and talked Vince McMahon into allowing him to defend the WWE Smackdown title at WrestleMania XIX despite two herniated disks pressing against his spinal cord. Kurt Angle, enduring terrible neck pain and with less than 25 percent of strength in his left arm, walked into WrestleMania and gave a fine performance. Specialists had recommended vertebrae-fusion surgery that could have ended his career. If it had to end, Angle wanted his final match to take place against Brock Lesnar at 'Mania.

Critics chided Angle for risking paralysis and possibly even death by performing at WrestleMania, but it turned out to be a godsend. After Angle postponed the vertebrae-fusion surgery, Dr. Hae-Dong Jho happened to read about his plight in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Dr. Jho proposed a surgery that would remove the portions of the disks pressing against the spinal cord instead of removing the total disk and fusing a part of Angle's hipbone into the two adjoining ones. Also, recovery would take only about six weeks, instead of the traditional nine months to a year. But the procedure would only postpone vertebrae-fusion surgery until five to 10 years in the future.

"The doctor is so excited and so confident, it almost scares me," Angle told wwe.com before the surgery. Nonetheless, Angle underwent the surgery on April 4 and had returned to Smackdown by early-June.

Angle suffered a broken neck prior to the 1996 Olympics, yet went on to win a gold medal. Absorbing high-impact moves on a nightly basis caused further deterioration of Angle's neck during his WWE career, but his immediate problems were caused when he rammed his left shoulder into a turnbuckle, jarring his entire head, at No Way Out.

THE HALF-YEAR

7. SABLE RETURNS TO WWE

Is Vince McMahon the most forgiving soul on the planet? Or is he the most money-hungry, unscrupulous promoter in history? Fans had to be wondering which was the case when Sable appeared without advanced billing on *Smackdown* in April.

Apparently, McMahon was willing to overlook the fact that Sable, whose real name is Rena Mero, once filed a $110-million lawsuit against his company, claiming negligence, breach of contract, unfair trade practices, and intentional infliction of emotional distress. She said WWE had pressured her to "accidentally" reveal her breasts on *Raw* and wanted her to participate in a lesbian storyline. When she refused to do so, then-Commissioner Shawn Michaels was sent out to strip her of the women's championship.

Mero used her ongoing lawsuit against WWE to gain exposure on *Entertainment Tonight, Hard Copy,* and other tabloid programs. WWE eventually reached a settlement with her after an ugly public relations battle. As late as the fall of 2002, she submitted a written statement to the Federal District Court of the Eastern District of New York, supporting Nicole Bass' claim that WWE sexually harassed its employees.

When her acting career didn't pan out, Mero's value to both Hollywood and wrestling hit a low point. That's why it was a shock when McMahon agreed to resuscitate her career, especially when it wasn't certain that she could generate much money for WWE.

Sable was plunged immediately into a storyline with fellow *Playboy* cover girl Torrie Wilson. She portrayed an older diva, jealous of Torrie's success, yet oddly attracted to her. After Sable played the lesbian card, insiders began to wonder if some "northern exposure" was too far off.

8. BROCK LESNAR WINS THE 2003 ROYAL RUMBLE

After losing the WWE Smackdown title to The Big Show at Survivor Series, Brock Lesnar had a lot to prove at the 2003 Royal Rumble. First, Lesnar had to defeat The Big Show—who had lost the Smackdown belt to Kurt Angle the previous month—just to earn a spot in the 30-man competition. And with a win at the Rumble would come a Smackdown title shot at WrestleMania XIX.

Shawn Michaels received the number-one spot, just as he did several years earlier, but wasn't able to overcome the odds to win this time. Christopher Nowinski distracted Michaels from ringside, enabling the number-two entrant, Chris Jericho, to eliminate Michaels. Obviously, it would be another man—not Michaels—who would be the story of the night.

At the 50-minute mark, the Rumble was down to four monsters: Lesnar, The Undertaker, Kane, and Batista. The Undertaker unleashed his tombstone piledriver to incapacitate Lesnar, and clotheslined Batista over the top rope. The Undertaker and Kane looked at each other, and it seemed as if "The Brothers Of Destruction" were about to show some teamwork, but Undertaker grabbed Kane and threw him to the arena floor.

Lesnar capitalized on the distraction by sending Undertaker over the top rope at the 54-minute mark. Obviously, WWE hadn't necessarily allowed the usual two-minute intervals between entries. As Lesnar celebrated his victory, Undertaker climbed back into the ring and shook his hand while indicating that he wanted a Smackdown title shot if Lesnar won the belt at WrestleMania XIX. The crowd applauded Lesnar's victory, sensing that he would become a two-time Smackdown champ in the near future.

TOP 50 STORIES OF

9. LONG-TIME MANAGER MISS ELIZABETH DIES

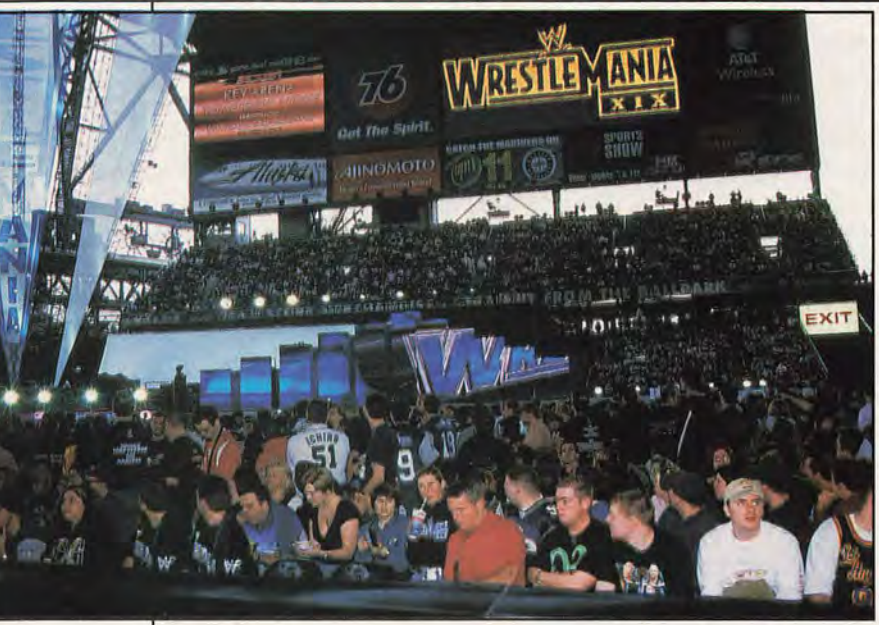
Elizabeth Hulette, best known as the valet/manager of ex-husband Randy Savage, was pronounced dead soon after her arrival at Kennestone Hospital in Marietta, Georgia, on the morning of May 1. She was 42.

Her boyfriend, Lex Luger, with whom she was staying in a Cobb County townhome outside of Atlanta, called 911 at about 5:30 a.m. and begged for help. Pleaded Luger: "My girlfriend has passed out, and I can't get her to come to ... Oh my God. Please send somebody ... please ... I've been trying to help her ... I'm scared to death." Later, Luger told police that Elizabeth had drunk two glasses of vodka, took medication for back pain, sat on a coach to eat, and began choking. Luger used napkins to try to remove the food from her mouth, and shook her in attempt to dislodge the food. When Luger realized she wasn't breathing, he called 911.

The combination of drugs or alcohol might have made it hard for Elizabeth to swallow, which could have contributed to her death. But the tragedy of her death was surrounded by more controversy when it was learned that Luger had been arrested for hitting Elizabeth only two weeks earlier, and that police reported illegal drugs at Luger's home.

Elizabeth is credited for helping to revolutionize the role of women in wrestling. As Randy Savage's manager, she was portrayed as a savvy businesswoman and as someone who could be vulnerable and strong at the same time. Her WWF career lasted from 1985 to 1992 and, four years later, she resurfaced in WCW, where she served as a valet to Savage, The Four Horsemen, the NWO, and Luger. WCW released her in 2000. Exact cause of death had not been determined as of press time.

10. WRESTLEMANIA XIX A MIXED FINANCIAL SUCCESS



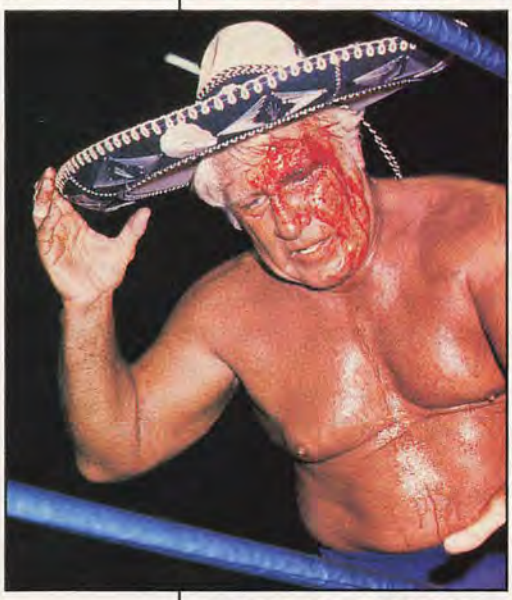
In the months leading to WrestleMania XIX, it seemed as if WWE's annual extravaganza would do the same record business as in previous years. Indeed, WWE sold its initial offering of 40,000 tickets during its first weekend of sales, generating more than $2.3-million at the start.

The numbers continued to look great at the live event, which took place on March 30 at Safeco Field in Seattle, Washington. WrestleMania XIX drew 54,097 fans from all 50 states and around the world to generate an impressive live gate of $2.76-million. More than 10,000 people attended Fan Axxess, a three-day festival with WWE memorabilia and merchandise, autograph signings, and interactive exhibits. Axxess garnered the corporate sponsorship of 1-800-Call-ATT and Snickers Cruncher, in addition to earning revenue from attending fans. WWE superstars posed for photographs with fans to raise more than $37,000 for the American Diabetes Association.

During hot years, WWE aims for the elusive plateau of one million pay-per-view buys. WWE executives were braced for a figure substantially lower than that, but were disappointed when WrestleMania generated only a reported 550,000. That was despite an exciting, critically acclaimed, star-studded show that included Steve Austin, The Rock, Triple-H, Hulk Hogan, Vince McMahon, Kurt Angle, and Brock Lesnar.

THE HALF-YEAR

11. FREDDIE BLASSIE DIES AT 85



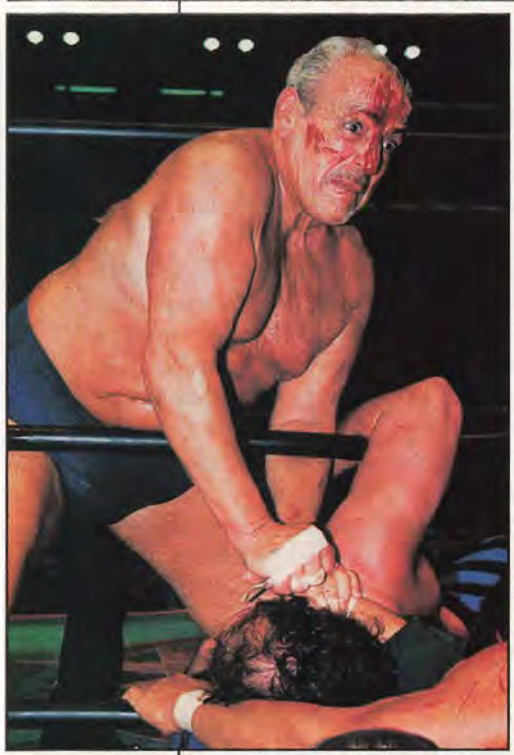
"Classy" Freddie Blassie, who achieved fame as a mainstream celebrity on the West Coast and later became a WWF manager, passed away on June 2 at Westchester County Hospital in suburban New York. Although Blassie enjoyed his greatest success in the Los Angeles area as multi-time holder of the World Wrestling Association and NWA Americas heavyweight championships, he was considered an elder statesman of WWE by the time of his death.

Born in St. Louis on February 8, 1918, Blassie was the son of Austro-Hungarian immigrants. He debuted in 1935, competing primarily at carnivals. Blassie served in the U.S. Navy in World War II and, upon his return, wrestled as "Sailor" Fred Blassie and Fred McDaniels. After moving to Atlanta, Blassie bleached his hair, popularized the phrase "pencil-neck geeks," and went on to hold the Southern title 14 times.

In California during the early-1960s, Blassie earned the nickname "Vampire" for biting his opponents. His rivals included Edouard Carpentier, Dick the Bruiser, The Destroyer, Antonino Rocca, Mr. Moto, and Gorgeous George. A six-time Americas champion, Blassie had several wild matches against John Tolos. On August 27, 1971, they packed 25,847 fans into the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, where heavy bleeding prevented then-Americas champ Tolos from completing the non-title bout. He even crossed paths with a young Roddy Piper during that period. Blassie also faced WWWF champions Bruno Sammartino and Pedro Morales on the East Coast, and Rikidozan in Japan.

When injuries and age restrictions imposed by state athletic commissions forced Blassie to retire, he began a career as a WWF manager in the 1970s. There, he managed stars such as Hulk Hogan, Jesse Ventura, George Steele, and WWF champion The Iron Sheik.

12. THE SHEIK DIES AT 76



Famed for his bloodthirsty use of pencils, forks, and fireballs, The Sheik was hailed as a legend when the wrestling world heard of his death on the morning of January 19. The Sheik, whose real name was Ed Farhat, told his wife, Joyce, that he was ready to be taken off the respirator after his liver and kidneys ceased to function. His health had steadily deteriorated since he suffered a heart attack in May 1995.

After playing football at the University of Michigan and serving in World War II, he eventually became one of the most feared wrestling villains of the 1960s and '70s. He ventured to Chicago in 1950 and achieved modest fame as a mid-carder, billed as The Sheik of Araby. He emerged as the top heel in Detroit and Toronto in the mid-1960s.

He owned Big Time Wrestling in Detroit, and reigned as that promotion's U.S. champion from 1965 to 1971. Bobo Brazil and Dick the Bruiser were his toughest rivals. He also challenged Bruno Sammartino and Pedro Morales for the WWWF title in the Northeast, and battled Fred Blassie for the Americas belt in Los Angeles. He bloodied Seiji Sakaguchi, Abdullah the Butcher, the Funk brothers, and other greats during his many tours of Japan. Readers of the *Victory Sports Series Wrestling Annual,* in the forerunner of the *PWI* Achievement Awards, voted him 1972's Most Hated Wrestler of the Year.

By the 1990s, The Sheik had dedicated himself to grooming young talent, including his nephew Sabu and Rob Van Dam. He also remained in high demand in Japan, where he teamed with Sabu, feuded with Atsushi Onita, and battled Terry Funk in front of 52,000 fans at Kawasaki Baseball Stadium in a gruesome 1994 encounter. A year later at the same venue, he defeated Damien in less than two minutes in his final match.

13. THE ROCK BREAKS WRESTLEMANIA CURSE WITH WIN OVER AUSTIN

By 2001, it was believed The Rock suffered from a "WrestleMania curse," especially when it came to Steve Austin. After all, The Rock had lost the WWF World title to Austin at WrestleManias XV and X7, both as a fan favorite and a heel. The Rock wanted to lift that curse at WrestleMania XIX.

The Rock succeeded. While no title was at stake, The Rock's personal pride was on the line because he wanted to beat Austin at least one time, at WrestleMania XIX. He knew that time was against him, because of Austin's impending retirement and his own Hollywood career.

Fans got the feeling that this WrestleMania would be different when The Rock survived both the Lou Thesz press and Austin's Rock bottom. Then The Rock kicked out after the stunner. Yet Austin kicked out after the people's elbow. "The Great One" retaliated with a Rock bottom. Then another. But The Rock had to make sure victory was certain. He grabbed Austin and executed another thunderous Rock bottom.

While it seemed impossible for Austin to survive such a barrage, fans were still shocked when The Rock scored a clean pinfall over "Stone-Cold" ... at WrestleMania no less. The following night, The Rock's win over Austin made a lot more sense when Raw General Manager Eric Bischoff announced that "The Rattlesnake's" deteriorating medical condition made it impossible for him to continue as an in-ring performer, and Goldberg showed up to confront Rock.

So, even though The Rock was soon to forsake wrestling for Hollywood yet again, he got his much-desired WrestleMania win over Austin. Then again, most people agreed that The Rock deserved to make his WWE resume complete.

14. HULK HOGAN RETURNS TO *SMACKDOWN*

After taking a five-month hiatus from WWE due to nagging back and knee injuries, Hulk Hogan made his return to *Smackdown* on January 23, the 19th anniversary of his first WWF title victory over The Iron Sheik. His appearance was a surprise, considering it was widely known that Hogan was considering offers from Japan at the time. General Manager Stephanie McMahon teased viewers all evening, leading to Hogan's return in the final segment.

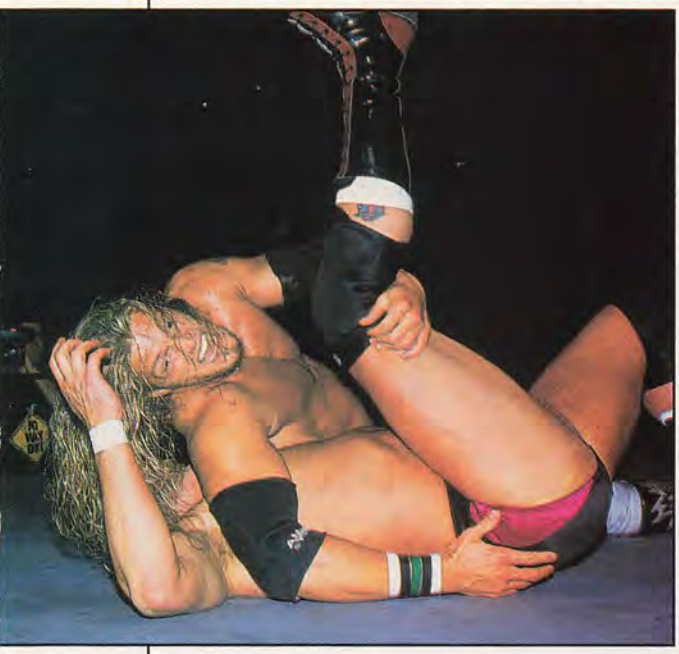
The live crowd greeted him with a tremendous ovation that lasted several minutes. Hogan promised that he would try to make what could be his final WWE run his greatest. Then Vince McMahon made his first *Smackdown* TV appearance in several months. He walked into the ring, interrupted Hogan, and said he was disappointed by Stephanie's surprise. McMahon remarked that "Hulkamania" and Al Wilson, who had assumed room temperature a week earlier, had one thing in common: Both were dead.

McMahon went on to say he didn't answer to anyone, not even "the man upstairs." Hogan responded by punching McMahon, ripping off his own shirt, and throwing it on top of the WWE chairman.

Hogan hadn't appeared on *Smackdown* since Brock Lesnar savaged him in a televised bout prior to SummerSlam 2002. Yet Hogan didn't seek revenge against Lesnar upon his return because he was immediately plunged into a feud with McMahon that culminated in a bloody streetfight at WrestleMania XIX.

THE HALF-YEAR

15. EDGE TO MISS ONE YEAR DUE TO NECK INJURY



Just as he seemed to be on the cusp of reaching main-event status, Edge was diagnosed with the same spinal condition that has afflicted a generation of WWE superstars. Edge had practically no strength in his left arm, the result of bone spurs touching his spinal cord and cutting off several nerves. Dr. Lloyd Youngblood of San Antonio performed vertebrae-fusion surgery on March 10, just as he has done for several other wrestlers.

Essentially, a portion of Edge's hipbone was grafted between two existing vertebrae, alleviating the nerve problem for the near future. The downside was that Dr. Youngblood predicted that Edge's recovery would take nine to 12 months.

"He said it looked like someone had taken a corkscrew to my spine, and my disks just looked like a shattered cork," Edge told wwe.com. "That's why [surgery] took five hours instead of 3½." Edge hurt his neck while overcompensating for his already-injured knee—and had narrowly escaped major shoulder surgery a few months earlier.

Edge was the seventh WWE superstar to undergo this type of spinal surgery. The others were Steve Austin, Rhyno, Hardcore Holly, Chris Benoit, Scotty Too Hotty, and Lita. The fact that it was necessary for Edge to have two vertebrae fused together at the young age of 29 added to growing criticism of WWE's in-ring style. Both Vince McMahon and Jim Ross asked the wrestlers to reduce their use of high-impact moves, but many complained that toning down their styles would affect their drawing power and, ultimately, their push and job security in WWE.

16. BILL GOLDBERG DEFEATS THE ROCK AMID BOOS AT BACKLASH

During the main event bout at Backlash, The Rock was delightfully surprised to find that it was Bill Goldberg, and not him, who was stung by the "Rocky sucks" effect. The Rock, whom the fans started booing as far back as WrestleMania X8 during his match against Hulk Hogan, was cheered as Goldberg—making his WWE pay-per-view debut—chased the limber-tailed "Great One" around the ring.

The boos became even louder when Goldberg planted "The Brahma Bull" with his own move, the Rock bottom. A discernable "Goldberg sucks" chant was heard when Goldberg kicked out from the people's elbow. Finally, Goldberg unleashed a spear, one of several during the match, and followed that with a jackhammer. He pinned The Rock after 15 minutes of action.

Why did so many fans in Worcester, Massachusetts, boo Goldberg, and how did The Rock suddenly regain his popularity? Announcer Jonathan Coachman suggested that Goldberg was viewed as an outsider by WWE fans and would have to earn their respect.

While Goldberg made a solid effort, his one-dimensional mix of spears, shoulderblocks, and tackles might have bored WWE fans accustomed to more integrated, fluid wrestling. Or maybe they were giving The Rock a proper sendoff before he returned to Hollywood. Or perhaps they were unwilling to back a man who had been outsmarted by The Rock several times leading up to the PPV. Or maybe they were reminding Goldberg not to become too confident for his own good.

Regardless of the reason, surprisingly low preliminary buy rate numbers for Backlash signaled that WWE had better be wise in its use of "Da Man."

17. "PIPER'S PIT" RETURNS TO WWE

When Roddy Piper hit the ring and took off his trench coat at WrestleMania XIX, most fans assumed he was there to help Hulk Hogan in his streetfight against Vince McMahon, who had just grabbed a steel pipe from under the ring. But it was Piper who ended up using the weapon to hit Hogan. What was Piper's agenda after a seven-year absence from WWE?

"Hot Rod's" artificial hip was obviously supporting a lot of added weight, so making a full-time in-ring comeback was out of the question. And he didn't have the mental focus to be an effective color commentator. The answer was revealed when he unveiled his pride and joy, "Piper's Pit," on *Smackdown.*

Piper hadn't hosted his famed interview segment since WrestleMania V, when he hosed down talk show host Morton Downey Jr. with a fire extinguisher. "Piper's Pit" was a revolutionary concept when it premiered on *WWF Championship Wrestling* in 1984. While the legendary Buddy Rogers had hosted "Rogers' Corner," a vicious heel had never been granted such a forum. Indeed, Piper made Rogers look like Dick Cavett with his insulting interview style and his tendency to attack his guests in four minutes or less.

In the most notorious "Piper's Pit" ever, he smashed Jimmy Snuka over the head with a coconut and rubbed bananas in his face. When "Piper's Pit" returned to WWE in April, Rikishi sought to avenge Snuka's humiliation. But Rikishi didn't count on the interference of Sean O'Haire, who held Rikishi in place for Piper. "Hold him straight 'cause here comes the freight!" yelled Piper, before smashing the big man over the head with a coconut.

Yes, R.P. was back.

18. TORRIE WILSON POSES FOR *PLAYBOY*

To the dismay of many WWE divas, Torrie Wilson was the next one selected to represent the company in *Playboy,* both on the cover and in an exclusive photo spread. She was the third WWE diva to receive the honor, following the lead of Sable (Rena Mero) and Chyna (Joanie Laurer).

Smackdown General Manager Stephanie McMahon accompanied Wilson to the *Playboy* Mansion, where Hugh Heffner commended both Wilson and WWE during an elaborate outdoor press conference. While the photos did reveal Wilson in the nude, the Smackdown beauty said she was happy that the spread was tastefully done. During an interview on wwe.com, Billy Kidman said he was impressed with how the *Playboy* staff kept his girlfriend comfortable during the photo shoot and that the layout ended up being very classy, although he had reservations about the project in the beginning.

Wilson's appearance in *Playboy* sparked a feud with Sable, who, upon returning to WWE, seemed jealous of the younger diva's success. The rivalry led to a bikini posedown between the two, along with several in-ring confrontations.

As of press time, it was not known whether Wilson's issue of *Playboy* had outsold those of Sable, whose appearance in the magazine set all-time records in 1999. Sable appeared in *Playboy* a second time under her real name, Rena Mero, after her first stint in WWE ended.

THE HALF-YEAR

19. SMACKDOWN CHAMP KURT ANGLE VS. CHRIS BENOIT EARNS ACCLAIM

Ever see a "Rabid Wolverine" cry? Imagine a match that is so intense and captivating that the crowd gives the *loser* a standing ovation. Imagine that ovation being so overwhelming that one of wrestling's toughest men breaks down into tears. That's what happened to Chris Benoit after his amazing battle with WWE Smackdown champion Kurt Angle at the Royal Rumble.

Shelton Benjamin and Charlie Haas attacked Benoit when he charged Angle at the opening bell. The referee ordered Benjamin and Haas to the backstage area, assuring that this title match would be free of further interference. Angle escaped Benoit's sharpshooter at the six-minute mark, and kicked out from Benoit's victory roll moments later. Benoit responded with two big crowd-pleasers: an overhead suplex that sent Angle several feet into the air, and a flying headbutt across the ring. The crowd was breathless when Angle narrowly escaped Benoit's pin attempt.

At the 19-minute mark, Angle rolled through Benoit's crossface attempt and applied the anklelock. Benoit tried to kick and wiggle his way out of the hold, but Angle held on with great tenacity. Angle took Benoit to a higher threshold of pain by turning the anklelock into a heel hook, forcing "The Canadian Crippler" into submission and ending the match *PWI* has labeled the best of the half-year.

Although Benjamin and Haas returned to the ring for a victory celebration with Angle, it was Benoit who received a standing ovation from the fans at Boston's FleetCenter. Yet Benoit was relegated to a three-way tag team match at WrestleMania XIX.

Imagine that.

20. WWE RAW CHAMP TRIPLE-H BEATS BOOKER T AT WRESTLEMANIA XIX

Although Booker T is a five-time WCW champion, it took him nearly two years to secure a pay-per-view match for a WWE world title. It finally happened at WrestleMania XIX, when Raw champion Triple-H defended against "The Bookerman." But even that took place amid Triple-H's insinuations that Booker wasn't "worthy" of a title shot, as the Raw champ stooped very low to play the race card leading into this encounter.

If anything, the video packages airing on *Raw* and *Confidential* that detailed Booker's tough childhood in Houston and the robbery that landed him in prison seemed to provide more reasons why Booker, who had overcome so much in his life, deserved this one chance at greatness.

The crowd in Seattle cheered as Booker chopped and punched Triple-H, and sent him crashing to the mat with a high backdrop. The veteran kept the pressure on Triple-H, following him to the arena floor, throwing him into the ringpost, and delivering a series of roundhouse and spin kicks back inside the squared circle.

But Ric Flair's interference changed the equation. When Booker missed a sidekick and crotched himself on the top rope, Flair dropped him onto the metal steps and rolled him back inside the ring. That enabled the Raw champion to apply the Indian deathlock, which made it impossible for Booker to place weight on his leg for the rest of the match.

Booker made a last-ditch effort by nailing Triple-H with the Harlem hangover, but Flair placed Helmsley's foot on the rope to break the count. After 18 minutes of action, an exhausted Triple-H caught Booker with the pedigree and scored the pinfall. Booker would have to wait for another chance at greatness.

21. UPN RENEWS SMACKDOWN IN MULTI-YEAR DEAL

CBS President Leslie Moonves (pictured), who also oversees UPN, expressed his appreciation for *Smackdown* when he told Reuters that the WWE program was responsible for cutting the struggling network's losses in half during 2002. According to Moonves, "Thursday night, our wrestling night, is our most profitable night."

Despite that vote of confidence, it was not a given that *Smackdown*—at least in its current two-hour format—would continue on UPN. Because WWE owns *Smackdown,* it collected most of the commercial revenue from the program. That meant *Smackdown* wasn't as profitable to UPN as it could be, and executives were thinking about reducing the show to one hour. That way, UPN could keep *Smackdown* as a strong lead-in to network-owned programs while making an extra hour of commercial time available. It was that kind of reasoning that led MTV to pass on another season of *Tough Enough* later in the year, although *TE* was a high ratings-grabber.

When Fox reportedly expressed interest in *Smackdown,* however, UPN compromised by allowing WWE to retain the two-hour format. In return, UPN agreed to pay a flat rate for the program and sell the commercial time for its own profit. That also worked out for WWE's marketing department, which had found it increasingly difficult to shoulder that responsibility week after week.

The previous agreement between WWE and UPN was due to expire in August.

22. KENTA KOBASHI DOWNS MITSUHARU MISAWA FOR GHC TITLE

Unlike its top two promotional rivals, All-Japan and New Japan, Pro Wrestling NOAH has experienced an upsurge in attendance as of late, and most observers credited Kenta Kobashi's feud with Mitsuharu Misawa as the reason for interest in the fledgling company. In the latest chapter of that rivalry, Kobashi defeated Misawa for the Global Honored Crown on March 1 in Tokyo.

Fans were aware that Kobashi had undergone many knee surgeries over the years, and that many physicians have advised him to retire. Kobashi has a hard time just climbing stairs at times. But that didn't prevent him from having an outstanding match with former partner and defending champ Misawa at Budokan Hall.

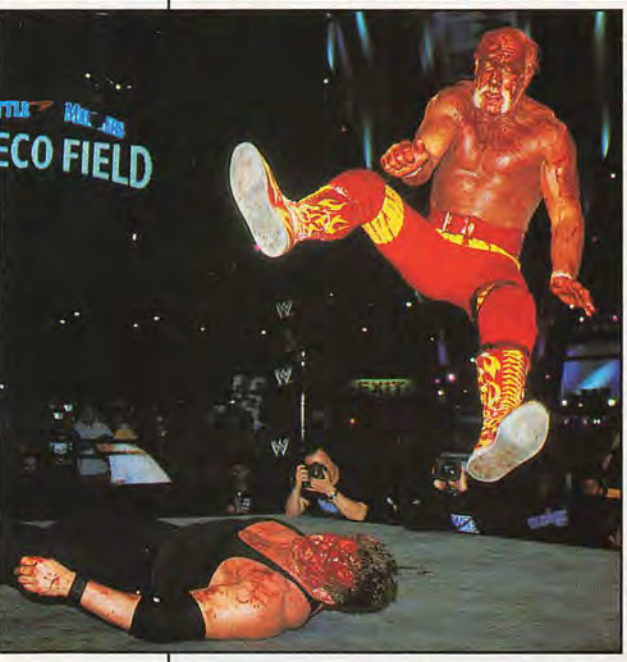
Misawa had Kobashi on the defensive many times, most notably with a tiger suplex from the rampway to the arena floor. It was several moments before either man could move. While Misawa employed those kinds of risky tactics, Kobashi retaliated with his punishing repertoire, including the burning hammer and his signature lariat.

The action reached its climax near the end of the bout, when both men started slugging it out in the middle of the ring. Despite his bad knees, Kobashi's superior endurance won out, and he pinned Misawa for the GHC championship.

Will Misawa avenge his loss to Kobashi? Not according to Misawa. He has already announced that their March 1 bout was their final singles encounter.

THE HALF-YEAR

23. HULK HOGAN BEATS VINCE McMAHON IN STREETFIGHT



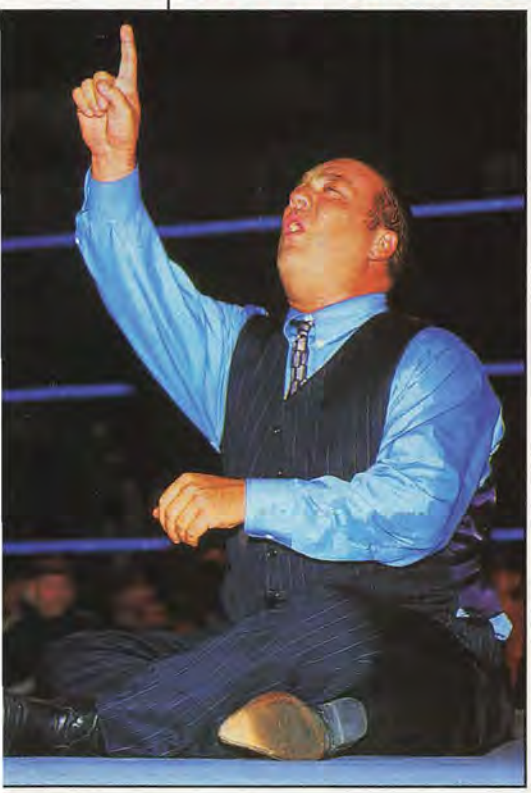
Think about how often Hulk Hogan might have wanted to deck Vince McMahon during tense contract negotiations. Consider how McMahon might have jealously eyed Hogan's physique at Titan Tower's state-of-the-art fitness facility. Imagine how Hogan felt when McMahon badmouthed him after the 1994 steroid trial. Imagine how McMahon felt when Hogan defected to WCW. It's understandable why these two men have been itching to tear into each other for the past 20 years.

Their streetfight at WrestleMania XIX was every bit as violent and emotional as any love-hate relationship. McMahon actually dominated their initial test of strength, kicking Hogan to his knees twice, and then to the arena floor. The ruthless WWE chairman threw his most famous star into the ringside barricade and into a ringpost. Hogan retaliated by bloodying McMahon with a steel chair.

McMahon regained the advantage and decided to use the Spanish announcers' table to his advantage. He laid a dazed and crimson-red Hogan on top of it. Like Dr. Frankenstein trying to destroy his own creation, McMahon delivered a legdrop onto Hogan and through the table, ECW-style. Hogan had never seen his own move used in such a vicious manner, let alone against him. McMahon made the cover and, incredibly, Hogan kicked out.

Moments later, Roddy Piper, disguised in a trench coat, ran into the ring and picked up a steel pipe McMahon had dropped on the canvas. He surprised the crowd by nailing Hogan with it, but the "Hulkster" still kicked out of McMahon's pin attempt. Despite Piper's interference, Hogan rebounded and used three legdrops to pin his evil boss.

24. PAUL HEYMAN DISMISSED AS HEAD *SMACKDOWN* WRITER



Although *Smackdown* narrowed the gap and eventually surpassed *Raw* in the ratings during his tenure as head writer, Paul Heyman was relieved of his duties in February following a series of disagreements with WWE Executive Producer Kevin Dunn, *Raw* head writer Brian Gewirtz, and Vince McMahon. Sources close to the situation suggested it was Heyman's volatile personality, rather than a lack of creativity, that led to his dismissal.

Heyman was credited with giving *Smackdown* a more sports-oriented feel and an emphasis on in-ring action, rather than backstage skits and grandiose storylines. The fact that *Smackdown's* two top stars, Brock Lesnar and Kurt Angle, were amateur standouts added to that atmosphere, as did Heyman's commitment to smaller, yet more athletic wrestlers, such as Chris Benoit, Rey Misterio Jr., and Los Guerreros. Vince and Stephanie McMahon, as Heyman's editors, apparently approved of the overall direction.

Vince McMahon had been anxious to tap into the creativity of Heyman, who helped revolutionize the business with ECW's extreme style during the 1990s and joined WWE after his promotion's demise in 2001. Sources insisted that McMahon still valued his opinion, which is why Heyman retained a position as consultant to both *Smackdown* and *Raw.* Heyman also continued his role as an on-air manager on *Smackdown* for a while.

The Smackdown roster was notified of the change at No Way Out. Bruce Prichard and Dave Lagana, a protege of Heyman, took over the hands-on writing duties.

25. STEINER BEATS RAW CHAMP TRIPLE-H BY DQ AT ROYAL RUMBLE

Scott Steiner was considered one of wrestling's hottest free agents when WWE signed him in October 2002, and fans clearly were excited about his upcoming appearance at the Royal Rumble, so he must have been very surprised by the reaction he heard during his first televised match against Raw champion Triple-H. Only 10 minutes into the bout, the fans at Boston's FleetCenter were starting to boo Steiner's repeated use of overhead suplexes, as well as his botched execution of a few of them.

His poor stamina, debilitating back and knee injuries, and apparent inability to carry a main-event match were turning the crowd against him. It became obvious the former WCW World champion shouldn't have been expected to wrestle longer than 10 minutes at this stage of his career ... and this Raw title bout went a full 18 minutes.

Aside from Ric Flair's interference on Triple-H's behalf, the ending of this match didn't endear Steiner or Helmsley to the fans, either. Triple-H grabbed his trusty sledgehammer and rammed it into Steiner's midsection, prompting the referee to disqualify the champion.

"Big Poppa Pump" was unable to recapture the crowd, not even when he put Triple-H in the Steiner recliner after the match. When Steiner dropped the Raw title belt across Helmsley's chest and raised his arms, the crowd booed more. He then climbed onto the second rope and flexed his muscles, which resulted in nothing but more boos.

With Steiner, WWE learned that star power wasn't enough to carry an important pay-per-view match. The fans expect those stars to deliver.

26. VINCE RUSSO'S SEX FACTION GAINS MOMENTUM

At the dawn of 2003, Vince Russo claimed he would mount a revolution that would change the face of NWA-TNA. But, as 2003 progressed, it became clear that Russo was bringing back a lot of familiar faces, too. Russo hoped this mix of old and new would make his faction, Sports Entertainment Xtreme, the dominant clique in TNA.

Russo, who was known for trying to elevate younger stars while in WCW, did the same in TNA by assembling a six-man mini-clique called Triple-X, comprised of Christopher Daniels, Elix Skipper, and Low-Ki. In fact, Daniels and Low-Ki went on defeat Chris Harris and James Storm for the NWA tag team title a few weeks later. Other upstarts, such as David Flair, were also members of Russo's SEX clique. All of this prompted NWA heavyweight champion Jeff Jarrett to recruit veterans such as The Road Warriors and Dusty Rhodes for an old school faction.

But, as with any scenario involving Russo, there were plenty of swerves. A mystery man claiming to be Mr. Wrestling IV attacked Rhodes, and unmasked to reveal Nikita Koloff underneath. Likewise, The Rock 'n' Roll Express debuted on January 29, and later appeared to be saving America's Most Wanted from an attack, but instead bashed them with steel chairs. Likewise, Raven debuted and attacked heavyweight champ Jeff Jarrett. Even former announcer Tony Schiavone appeared in TNA, blaming Mike Tenay for backstabbing him in WCW.

For those keeping track, that meant Nikita Koloff, The Rock 'n' Roll Express, Raven, and Tony Schiavone all had sympathies toward Russo's "new blood" faction. *That's* a new blood faction?

THE HALF-YEAR

27. JEFF JARRETT BEATS STING TO MERGE NWA AND WWA TITLES

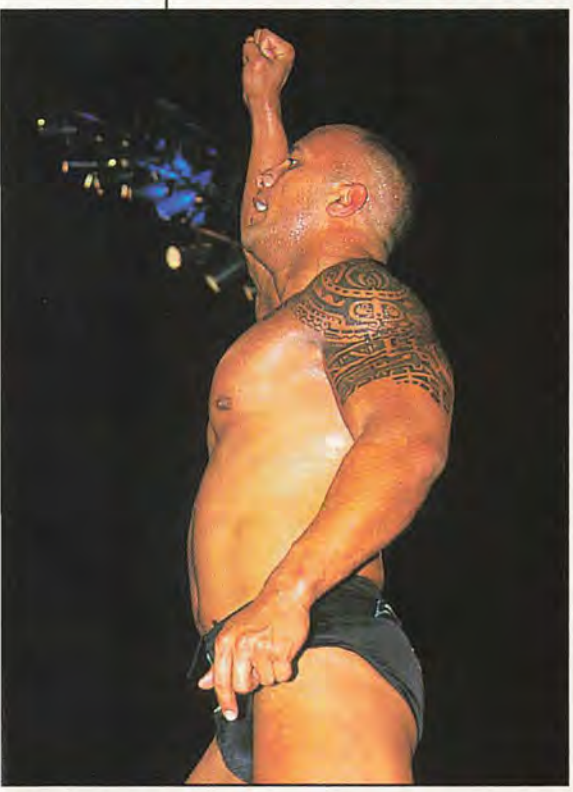
On the long road to restoring his NWA championship to its former prestige, Jeff Jarrett went on a three-day World Wrestling All-Stars tour of Australia and New Zealand that culminated with a unification match between Jarrett and WWA champion Sting on May 25 in Auckland. When Sting appeared in the rafters of the North Shore Events Centre earlier on the show, the 4,000 fans in attendance made it clear that he was their favorite.

At the 10-minute mark of the unification bout, Jarrett brought his guitar into the ring, and Sting used his black bat to splinter it. With Jarrett on the defensive, Sting rushed him with a Stinger splash in the corner. Unfortunately, the referee got caught in the middle when Sting went for the move a second time. Sting executed the scorpion deathdrop, but couldn't get the pinfall because the referee was still out.

Joe E. Legend (WWE's Just Joe) emerged from the backstage area to attack the WWA champion in the ring. Rick Steiner intercepted, and clotheslined him over the top rope. That gave Sting enough time to apply the scorpion deathlock on Jarrett. But Sting didn't count on Steiner, his long-time friend, using what was left of the splintered guitar to smash him in the head. As the referee recovered, Jarrett rolled over to score the pin on Sting. Jarrett had unified the NWA and WWA championships.

The NWA-TNA X and WWA international cruiserweight titles were unified earlier on the card when X champion Chris Sabin defeated WWA international cruiserweight champ Jerry Lynn, Frankie Kazarian, and Johnny Swinger in a four-way bout. WWA agreed to recognize the NWA titles if it ran another tour.

28. THE ROCK BEATS HULK HOGAN AT NO WAY OUT



It was the rematch that had to take place, yet no one expected it to surpass the original. And it didn't. The major twist in this battle between The Rock and Hulk Hogan was, this time, the fans were *supposed* to be on Hogan's side. And, just as most of the Toronto fans had supported "Hollywood" Hogan at WrestleMania X8, the Montreal fans cheered the "Hulkster" at No Way Out.

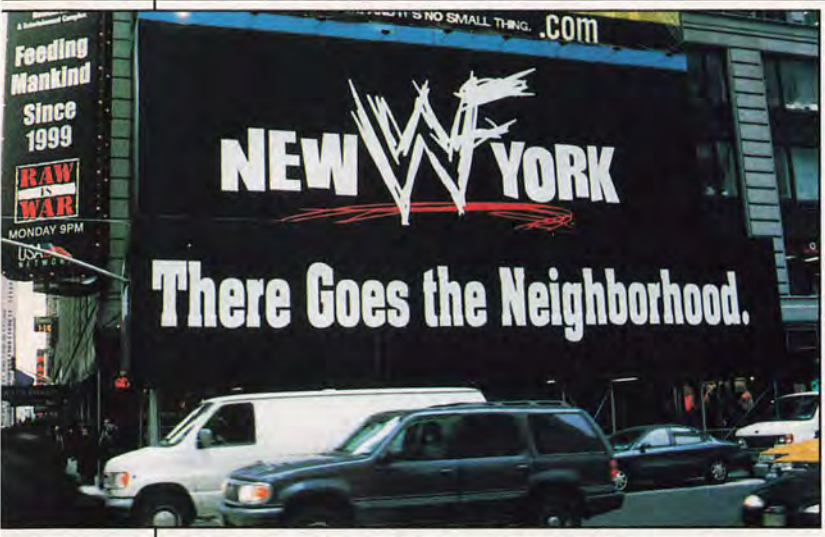
Hogan, still hindered by back injuries and with substantially lower stamina, wasn't able to compete at the same level as the previous year. Likewise, The Rock suffered from ring rust stemming from all the time he had spent in Hollywood. In the end, though, it was the conclusion—the ending that can happen only in Montreal and always does—that was the story of the night.

The "Hulkster" was in the midst of one of his immortal comebacks and was about to deliver the legdrop onto The Rock when the lights went out in the Molson Centre. When the lights came back on, the referee was supposedly knocked unconscious. Vince McMahon emerged from backstage with a surprised expression on his face.

At that moment, the referee slid a chair to The Rock, who smashed Hogan over the head with it. The crowd didn't realize the referee was Sylvan Grenier, a local star with Northern Championship Wrestling and a future member of La Resistance.

McMahon showed his culpability by celebrating The Rock's tainted victory. And, yet again he had spit in the face of Montreal fans.

29. WWE SHUTS DOWN THE WORLD



When WWE posted a $16-million loss in the final fiscal quarter of 2002, the McMahons decided to curb some of their losses by closing The World, the restaurant and entertainment complex located in New York City's Times Square. The World had been riddled with financial problems since its grand opening in 2000, and was projected to lose another $9.5-million in 2003.

The sluggish U.S. economy and the 9/11 attacks that directly affected New York City were only two contributing factors. The final blow occurred when WWE had to hire forensic accounting specialists to investigate suspected embezzlement at the nightclub. In November 2002, The World's general manager, Kenton Jenkins, was finally arrested for allegedly using restaurant checks to funnel $437,000 into a phony construction business.

During the final year, WWE experimented with several business models to attempt to increase revenue for both the restaurant and retail store. That included changing the name from WWF New York to the less wrestling-oriented The World.

The property will be subleased until WWE's lease runs out in 2017, and, of course, there is always the option of retaking control of the complex when wrestling becomes hot again. According to CEO Linda McMahon, it would be wiser for WWE to invest its capital in overseas expansion for its core wrestling business.

30. ULTIMO DRAGON DEBUTS IN WWE

During a press conference in Japan, Ultimo Dragon confirmed that he had signed a three-year contract with WWE, although he also admitted that it was for less than he earned in WCW. He also unveiled a new mask and new attire before embarking on his WWE career.

Ultimo's first appearance came at a dark match prior to a *Sunday Night Heat* taping and a live *Raw* broadcast on May 19. He mixed in plenty of martial arts in his impressive outing against Rico. Although Ultimo's first match was on a Raw brand show, he was scheduled to become a cornerstone of Smackdown's cruiserweight division. Officials considered Ultimo a possible headliner on WWE's tour of Japan later in the year, and were interested in a potential relationship with his promotion and training school, Toryumon, which specializes in grooming Luchadors.

WWE hoped Ultimo could offer the same steady expertise that he lent to WCW's cruiserweight division during its mid-1990s heyday. While in WCW, Ultimo won the cruiserweight and TV belts. Yet he gained his international reputation by capturing Japan's J-Crown, comprised of eight championships representing junior heavyweight, light heavyweight, and welterweight divisions, including the old WWF junior heavyweight title.

A few years earlier, botched surgery to remove bone chips from Ultimo's elbow had seemingly ended his career. But thanks to extended rest and rehabilitation, followed by surgery to restore full use of his arm, the 36-year-old Ultimo was confident he could keep pace in WWE.

THE HALF-YEAR

31. KEVIN NASH BEATS RAW CHAMP TRIPLE-H BY DQ AT JUDGMENT DAY

When Kevin Nash and Triple-H were part of The Kliq in the mid-1990s, Helmsley—a junior member—probably fantasized about besting Nash, a leader of the notorious backstage group. At Judgment Day, Triple-H got his chance, as he defended the WWE Raw title against "Big Daddy Cool."

Ric Flair, who was in Triple-H's corner, and Shawn Michaels, who was in Nash's corner, quickly became non-factors when those two brawled to the back before the opening bell. Nash began with his methodical assault, driving his knees into the champion's midsection near the turnbuckles. Helmsley went for the pedigree early, but made only a near-fall at the six-minute mark. It was clearly a mistake when Helmsley attempted a second pedigree, especially on a seven-footer like Nash. He sent Triple-H sailing with a back bodydrop over the top rope.

Then again, Nash clearly made a mistake by sending Triple-H to the outside. "The Cerebral Assassin" grabbed his sledgehammer from under the apron. Back in the ring, the referee tried to grab it, but Helmsley rammed the official with it. Nash started punching Triple-H as the referee disqualified the champion after only seven minutes.

Like Scott Steiner at the Royal Rumble, Nash tried to save the mediocre bout with a postmatch attack. As in the Steiner match, fans booed as Nash jackknifed Helmsley in the ring and again through the announcers' table on the stage.

Although Helmsley-Nash didn't disappoint as badly as Helmsley-Steiner did, the crowd reaction had to force "The Game" to seriously reconsider his tactics … and his choice of opponents.

32. HASHIMOTO WINS ALL-JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN FROM MUTO

Shinya Hashimoto made history on February 23 in Tokyo by becoming the only man to capture the All-Japan, IWGP, and NWA championships. To accomplish that feat, he had to defeat The Great Muta (Keiji Muto) in a raucous 20-minute match.

But that might be a bit deceptive. Muta actually spent the first six minutes using stalling tactics, so much so that Hashimoto bailed out to the arena floor. It was there that Hashimoto fell into Muta's trap, and fell prey to the shining wizard, a devastating running knee. Then Muta rammed Hashimoto's head into the ringpost. He even used a pen to gouge Hashimoto's wound until it seemed to gush red ink. When Hashimoto tried to mount a comeback, Muta blew green mist into his eyes.

Despite those vicious tactics and the fact that Hashimoto was lying there in a pool of red and green, Muta was enthusiastically cheered at Budokan Hall, where he's considered a legend—and where Hashimoto is known primarily as a Zero-One and former New Japan star.

Hashimoto rebounded with a DDT before falling prey to Muta's moonsault. The crowd gasped when Hashimoto hit Muta with a devastating spin kick. The fans continued to chant for Muta as he remained trapped in Hashimoto's armbar. Muta finally reached the ropes and blew his mist again, but missed his target. He hit Hashimoto with another shining wizard. Hashimoto survived, and decided to use Muta's own finisher against him, launching into a shining wizard and following that with a brainbuster to score the pinfall.

Drenched in blood, Hashimoto looked exhausted. But he was also adorned with the three belts symbolizing the All-Japan Triple Crown. Even the Budokan Hall fans had to appreciate that.

33. "SAILOR" ART THOMAS DIES OF CANCER

Considered one of the most impressive musclemen of the 1960s and 1970s, "Sailor" Art Thomas died on the morning of March 20 at a hospice care facility in Madison, Wisconsin. The 79-year-old had been diagnosed with cancer only a month earlier.

As his nickname would suggest, Thomas served in the U.S. Navy, unloading munitions in the Pacific theater during World War II. Worried that he would fall out of shape after his discharge, Thomas began lifting weights and developed into an extraordinary weightlifter, with impressive showings in AAU bodybuilding contests in the 1950s. He didn't become a pro wrestler until he was in his late-30s. The 6'3", 260-pounder got his big break at Vince McMahon Sr.'s television tapings in Washington, D.C. He sat in the front row, wearing his Navy uniform, and attacked heel Steve Stanlee during the show.

Of course, Thomas had to overcome the challenge of being an African-American in the closed business of pro wrestling, yet his natural likeability made him very popular. While Thomas had runs in Memphis, Florida, and Texas, where held the Texas State title in 1962, he usually stayed close to the Midwest, particularly in Chicago, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, and his adopted hometown of Madison. He often ventured into the Toronto area, where he held the International tag team championship with John Paul Henning in 1963. He also beat Baron Von Raschke for the Indianapolis-based WWA title in 1972.

Thomas was a top rival of Dick the Bruiser, and often teamed with Bobo Brazil and Dory Dixon. His most notable matches were against NWA World champion Lou Thesz and WWWF World champion Bruno Sammartino. In 1981, Thomas wrestled his final match at an AWA show in Chicago.

34. GREAT SASUKE ELECTED TO JAPANESE LEGISLATURE

Proving that Japan might be the only place in the world in which a politician can run for office while wearing a mask, The Great Sasuke won a seat in the national legislature from the conservative Iwate prefecture, located 290 miles north of Tokyo. Sasuke, whose real name is Masanori Murakawa, created controversy when he refused to take off his mask—usually a black and white model with scarlet streaks and golden wings by the eyeholes—after his election to office.

Conservative legislators, who have already criticized some of their colleagues for not wearing neckties, were concerned by Sasuke's stance. "There is no law specifically forbidding it," one official told the Nikkan Sports newspaper. "But now that he has won, we must look into the issue."

The 33-year-old Sasuke, who believes his mask symbolizes his "superabundant power," shared his point of view with Nikkan Sports. He said, "This is my face … I won support from voters with this face, and to take it off would be breaking promises." Indeed, Sasuke's wrestling mystique helped him woo regional voters, especially ones who knew him by his nickname, "The North Eastern Hero."

Sasuke joined the ranks of Antonio Inoki and Hiroshi Hase, other wrestlers-turned-politicians in Japan. The former Michinoku Pro star, who made occasional appearances in ECW, was the first winner of the cruiserweight J-Crown.

THE HALF-YEAR

35. SMACKDOWN CHAMP LESNAR BEATS BIG SHOW IN STRETCHER MATCH

Whether it was a sudden inner drive or the quality of his opponents, there was little doubt that The Big Show's game had improved during the first half of 2003, especially in his matches against WWE Smackdown champion Brock Lesnar. For Lesnar, however, the matchup must have seemed a bit like a retread, as he had already defeated The Big Show in another high-profile encounter at the Royal Rumble.

Count on WWE to add a twist to make it interesting. At Judgment Day, Lesnar faced his arch-rival in a stretcher match. Both men used the stretcher against each other early in the match. Rey Misterio Jr., who had been tied onto a stretcher by paramedics before Big Show viciously slammed him into a ringpost weeks earlier at Backlash, arrived at ringside at the 11-minute mark. He gained revenge by hitting Show with a 619, earning hoots of approval from the crowd in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The fans went into an uproar when Lesnar parked a forklift near the ring. The Smackdown champion leveled Big Show with a cross bodyblock and followed that with several shouldertackles. He took Big Show over with an amazing vertical suplex. He finished off Show with an F5.

Then came the hydraulics. Lesnar dragged Show onto the forklift and rolled him onto the stretcher. He then used the forklift to drive the 485-pounder out of the arena, winning the match after 15 minutes of action.

As far as Lesnar was concerned, at least on this night, the Show was over.

36. CHRISTIAN WINS INTERCONTINENTAL TITLE IN BATTLE ROYAL

When Raw co-General Manager Steve Austin assembled seven former Intercontinental champions (plus Booker T) to participate in a battle royal for the reactivated I-C championship, Christian might have been considered the least likely to emerge victorious. Following his battle royal victory at Judgment Day, Christian still seemed the least deserving of the bunch.

Christian had to go through a tough field of hungry contenders: Booker, Chris Jericho, Goldust, Kane, Rob Van Dam, Val Venis, and Lance Storm.

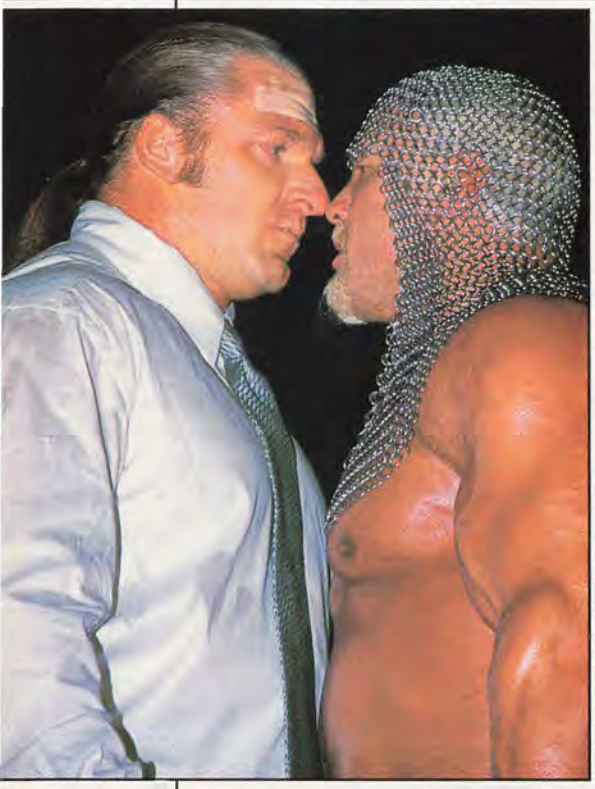
After Kane—the last man to hold the Intercontinental belt—sent Storm over the top rope in the first minute, the other six participants ganged up on "The Big Red Machine" and eliminated him only moments later. At the mere two-minute mark, only Christian, Booker, Jericho, and Goldust were left.

Booker eliminated his tag team partner, Goldust, after a quick exchange. They shook hands to show there were no hard feelings. Christian then eliminated his partner, Jericho, after tricking him into going for the lionsault against Booker. Jericho yelled at Christian to show there *were* hard feelings. Booker, however, succeeded in throwing Christian over the top rope.

Pat Patterson, the very first Intercontinental champion, got up from ringside to present Booker with the title belt. But Christian punched him, grabbed the belt, and hit Booker with it. The referee, who had been knocked down and missed Booker's elimination of Christian, recovered enough to see Christian throw a dazed Booker over the top. He called for the bell and declared Christian the new champion.

Kane had lost a unification match against Raw champion Triple-H in October 2002, thereby eliminating the I-C title. It was originally established in 1979.

37. WWE RAW CHAMPION TRIPLE-H DEFEATS STEINER AT NO WAY OUT



Officials probably regretted that Triple-H's WWE Raw title defense against Scott Steiner at the Royal Rumble didn't result in a straight decision, because it seemed they had no choice but to book a rematch for No Way Out. Unfortunately for Steiner and Helmsley, the last place to try to save a lost cause is Montreal, where the fans show great respect for legends but won't tolerate what Jim Ross would call an "ugly bowling shoe" of a match.

Actually, the Helmsley-Steiner rematch was better than the first, mainly because it ran only 13 minutes instead of 20. But Montreal fans, based on the match at the Royal Rumble, already knew what to expect. They were merciless with their "Steiner sucks!" chants, although they cheered Hogan for an arguably worse performance later in the show.

As referee Earl Hebner withstood "You screwed Bret!" chants, Helmsley and Steiner made solid efforts. The former WCW World champion sent Triple-H bouncing over the top rope and off the ring apron, and later tossed him with a fallaway slam. Ric Flair, at ringside for Triple-H, broke the count and saved the game for "The Game."

Toward the end, "Big Poppa Pump" snared Triple-H in the Steiner recliner. Flair motioned for reinforcements, and Triple-H's fellow Evolution members, Randy Orton and Batista, rescued Helmsley from the hold. Steiner fought off Orton and Batista, but Triple-H nailed him with the Raw title belt. Yet that wasn't enough to keep Steiner down for the count. "The Game" had to plant him with the pedigree to score the pinfall.

38. PAUL LONDON EMERGES VICTORIOUS IN 2003 SUPER 8

He seemed to come out of nowhere, not even ranked in last year's *"PWI* 500," but quickly rose to prominence in Ring of Honor in late-2002. Thanks to outstanding matches against fellow trainees of the Shawn Michaels/Rudy Boy Gonzales training schools in San Antonio, Paul London earned some WWE dark matches and, on April 5, a spot in the 2003 Super 8, held at St. Matthew's Parish Hall located outside of Wilmington, Delaware.

ECWA promoter Jim Kettner arranged for North America's best up-and-coming cruiserweight talent to participate in the seventh annual tournament. In the opening round, "The Future" Frankie Kazarian pinned "The Future" Chris Sabin, Smackdown's Brian "Spanky" Kendrick defeated Ohio Valley Wrestling's Chris Cage, Western Canada's Chance Beckett defeated Florida's Sedrick Strong, and London beat New England indy star Alex Arion. In the semifinals, London pinned Kazarian with a shooting star press, and Beckett—who suffered a nasty gash on his chin against Strong—upset Spanky.

Going into the tournament final, both men had issues. London still wasn't completely recovered from a nasal infection that required surgery a few weeks earlier, and Beckett's chin was still bleeding.

The same fans that had booed Beckett earlier in the evening were solidly behind "Mr. Showtime," despite London's popularity in the Northeast. But that didn't prevent London from trapping Beckett in a torture device, made famous by Keiji Muto. The referee dropped Beckett's arm three times and declared London the winner.

THE HALF-YEAR

39. WWE ACCUSES MARTHA HART OF WRONGDOING

A Missouri Circuit Court judge ruled in January that there was "overwhelming evidence" that the Hart family "and/or its counsel engaged in fraud, collusion, and/or tortious conduct" while pursuing a wrongful death claim—regarding Owen Hart's fatal fall at Kansas City's Kemper Arena in May 1999—against WWE. Attorneys raised the issue during WWE's lawsuit against Lewmar Inc., maker of the trigger-lock harness designed to keep Hart in the stunt harness. They asserted that Owen's widow, Martha, unfairly targeted WWE when she successfully sued the company for $18-million.

Judge Douglas E. Long Jr. agreed with that assessment, especially when he learned that the law firm representing Martha—Robb & Robb of Kansas City—had required Owen's 10 siblings to sign an agreement preventing them from testifying on WWE's behalf in order to receive their share of a potential settlement. WWE attorneys argued that the testimony of Owen's family was crucial when determining how much longer he planned to wrestle, a factor that would have affected the settlement amount.

WWE attorney Jerry McDevitt told the *Kansas City Star* that the ruling contained "some of the strongest statements I've ever seen in my 22 years of practice about the manner in which this case was handled."

Gary Robb represented the Hart family—specifically Martha, along with Owen's parents, Stu and Helen—in the original lawsuit. He said Martha "wasn't going to take a nickel" from Lewmar "because she believed WWE was solely responsible."

40. FORMER WWE STARS RESURFACE IN NWA-TNA

Although many ex-WWE wrestlers are still sorry that WCW and ECW no longer exist as alternative places of employment, an increasing number are discovering that NWA-TNA is an excellent place to ply their trade. D-Lo Brown had seemingly just gained momentum with the Raw brand due to a tacky race-based storyline, with Theodore Long as his new manager. Then, with little notice, WWE decided to drop Brown, although it kept Long on the payroll.

TNA considered Brown a good catch, however. And he wasn't the only one. Like Brown, Raven had distinguished himself as an excellent commentator on *Sunday Night Heat,* but WWE decided it no longer wanted Raven's services, either as a wrestler or broadcaster. Raven also went to TNA, where he formed Extreme Revolution, a collection of former ECW and WWE stars, including Justin Credible, Perry Saturn, and The Sandman. His brutal match against NWA heavyweight champion Jeff Jarrett on April 30 is being hailed as a Match of the Year candidate.

Insiders figured this could be just the beginning. The sluggish U.S. economy, a creative slump, and new developmental prospects might convince WWE executives that more cutbacks are necessary. And, since TNA doesn't sign all wrestlers to rigid contracts and is willing to feature some of them on a revolving basis, more ex-WWE stars were expected to contact the Jarretts.

Perhaps the most talked-about free agent is former WWF World tag team, Intercontinental, hardcore, and European champ Jeff Hardy, who was released on April 22. Hardy, however, insisted that he wanted to dedicate himself to his artwork and his rock band, Peroxwhygen, instead of continuing his wrestling career.

41. TRISH STRATUS REGAINS WWE WOMEN'S BELT FROM VICTORIA

For the second time, Jazz went into a high-profile match as the clear favorite, and Trish Stratus emerged triumphant with the WWE women's title. On the first occasion, Jazz was making her debut at Survivor Series 2001. She was favored to win the championship, which had been left vacant by Chyna's departure, in a six-way bout also involving Ivory, Lita, Molly Holly, Jacquelyn, and Trish, who was best known as eye candy—certainly not an outstanding wrestler—at that point in her career. Stratus surprised everyone by emerging victorious.

At WrestleMania XIX, Stratus fooled Jazz again. It was a three-way match pitting Trish against Jazz against defending champion Victoria. Jazz started aggressively by attacking her two opponents before the opening bell. Victoria almost scored an early pinfall by powerslamming Jazz only two minutes into the match. For a while, Jazz and Victoria's mutual hatred of Trish worked to their advantage, as they double-teamed her frequently, even incapacitating her with vicious double-shoulderbreaker.

Jazz seemed to have the women's belt within her grasp when she locked Stratus in an STF. Steven Richards, realizing Victoria was on the verge of losing the bout, rescued Trish from certain defeat. And, just like Survivor Series 2001, Trish ended up winning the match by pinning someone other than Jazz. This time around, she nailed Victoria with a hard roundhouse kick to score the three-count on the champ. As a result, Stratus tied Fabulous Moolah for the most WWE women's title reigns, at four apiece.

42. JIM ROSS DISCONTINUES "THE ROSS REPORT"

Where will everyone go for inside information? For many fans and journalists alike, "The Ross Report" became a trustworthy source for honest evaluations of the WWE product, injury updates, and appraisals of up-and-coming stars. As WWE's vice president of talent relations, Jim Ross was as loyal to the company as anyone, yet that didn't prevent him from offering candid opinions instead of corporate spin, at least at times.

On January 3, Ross stated he simply didn't have the time to devote to his weekly wwe.com column anymore. In addition to his broadcasting, talent management, and supervision of the Ohio Valley Wrestling developmental program, good ol' J.R. was gearing up for a tour to promote his new cookbook and barbecue sauce. He was actively pursuing ways to spend more time with his family. Indeed, within six months, Ross announced his intention to hand over more responsibilities to other officials, such as Johnny Ace and Fit Finlay.

Ross' reasons seemed valid, yet he was also careful to mention the pitfalls of writing such a report. "I have never intended to slight any talent, but the mere omission of a particular talent from a 'Ross Report' can be perceived as a negative for that individual," he noted in his final online column. "That was never my goal, but it seemed like the column oftentimes took on a life of its own, with many often writing about what J.R. 'really' was saying."

Meanwhile, rumors persisted that Vince McMahon might have asked Ross to discontinue his column because its honest evaluations too often reflected poorly on WWE, which was going through a difficult creative and financial cycle. Maybe that's what J.R. *really* was saying.

THE HALF-YEAR

43. TONY ALTIMORE DIES OF NATURAL CAUSES

Best known as Lou Albano's partner in The Sicilians, Tony Altimore was remembered as a tough-as-nails grappler from wrestling's golden era when he died on February 18 at the age of 74. His health had deteriorated since he underwent surgery for a detached retina.

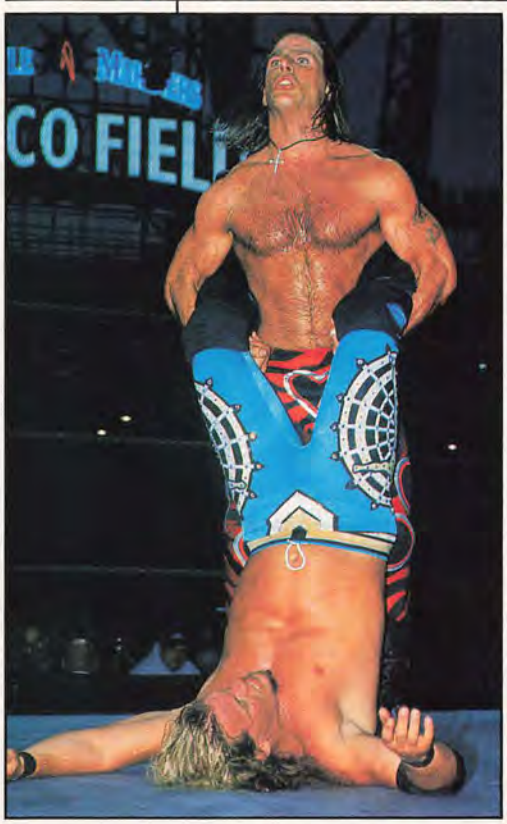
Altimore's persona was that of an Italian mobster, yet another ethnic stereotype that was so popular in the Northeast during that period. He and Albano could be described as the Sopranos of their time, except they didn't wear pants—only short wrestling trunks—to match their fedora hats, shirts, ties, stylish jackets, and gloves.

The Sicilians' greatest claim to fame was their victory over Spiros Arion and Arnold Skoaland for the WWWF U.S. tag team title in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on July 10, 1967. But even that glory didn't last long, as they lost the belts to Arion and WWWF World champion Bruno Sammartino at the return show in Atlantic City only two weeks later.

After the 1960s, Altimore's involvement in pro wrestling was intermittent. While Albano went on to become a highly successful manager, Altimore's only other relationship with the company was as Hulk Hogan's personal road agent in the late-1970s and very early-1980. He also briefly ran The Quest Factory, a training school in Orange, New Jersey, in 1984.

Altimore spent most of his life in Stamford, Connecticut. Appropriately enough, his nickname was "The Stamford Stomper."

44. SHAWN MICHAELS PINS CHRIS JERICHO AT WRESTLEMANIA XIX



Both Shawn Michaels and Chris Jericho thrive on being "The Showstopper." Each man can make a case as to why he has made the greater contribution to the business. Michaels helped keep the WWF afloat in the mid-1990s by showcasing a faster, fresher style to wrestling fans as the World heavyweight champion. While Jericho has never had the responsibility of carrying an entire company on his shoulders, he has the most impressive footnote in *The Wrestling Almanac* as the industry's first undisputed world champion in 40 years.

At WrestleMania XIX, these two showstoppers had their opportunity to stop wrestling's premier show. Michaels and Jericho traded an even number of headlocks and hammerlocks in the opening minutes. "The Heartbreak Kid" was the first to gain the advantage by sending Jericho out of the ring and knocking him silly with a baseball slide.

Seven minutes into this thriller, Y2J tried to end the match by sitting down on Michaels' vulnerable lower back with the Walls of Jericho. Amazingly, Michaels withstood the pain, and the two men were still doing battle at the 20-minute mark.

Michaels foiled Jericho's attempt at a superplex, shoved him down to the canvas, and followed that with a flying elbowdrop from the top rope. HBK went for a superkick, but the Winnipeg native ducked and applied the Walls of Jericho again. Michaels finally reached the ropes. Jericho made a last-ditch effort to suplex Michaels, who finally outmaneuvered Y2J and rolled him over for the pinfall.

Jericho made an uncharacteristic effort to shake Michaels' hand after the match. But, characteristically, he hit Michaels—his one-time role model—with a low blow.

45. WWE SMACKDOWN CHAMPION LESNAR DEFEATS CENA AT BACKLASH

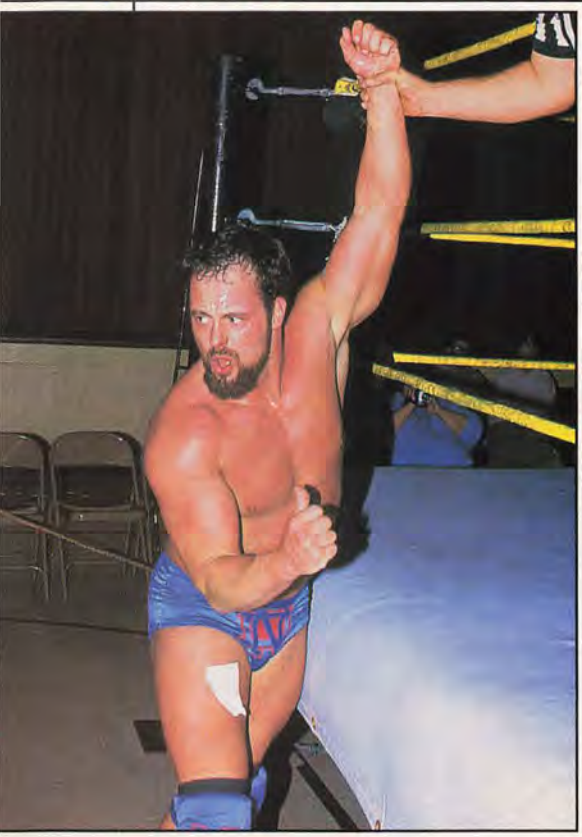
Two years ago, Brock Lesnar and John Cena would have been lucky to headline Six Flags Kentucky Kingdom in an Ohio Valley Wrestling title match. Even a year ago, considering Cena's reputation as a Smackdown prelim wrestler, such a match might have seemed unimaginable. At Backlash, however, Lesnar defended his WWE Smackdown title against Cena.

Cena, determined to make the most of the opportunity, charged Lesnar at the opening bell. But Lesnar's physicality proved too much, and he gradually overwhelmed the wannabe gangsta rapper. Nearing the 10-minute mark, Cena managed to neutralize Lesnar on the mat. The fans in Worcester, Massachusetts, were just satisfied that their hometown hero was able to keep pace with the monster Lesnar for that long a time.

After Cena fired off an elbow, Lesnar retaliated with two devastating clotheslines. The Smackdown champion went for a powerslam, but that failed to put Cena away. Lesnar continued his power game, spearing Cena into the corner and muscling him with two shoulderblocks.

At the 13-minute mark, Cena unleashed his most effective offensive weapon of the evening (other than his opening rap): a low blow. He rolled up Lesnar for a near-fall. Some fans actually booed when Lesnar kicked out. Lesnar proceeded to knock Cena backward into the corner. In desperation, Cena grabbed a chain, which the referee managed to pry away from him. Moments later, Lesnar spun Cena into the F5 and scored the pinfall to retain his title.

46. NICK DINSMORE CAPTURES OHIO VALLEY GOLD



The power struggle had to happen sometime, and the battle between the co-leaders of The Revolution took place on February 19 in Louisville, Kentucky, and was aired on OVW television three days later. But there only one wrinkle, and his name was Nick Dinsmore, the third participant in a triple threat match for Damaja's OVW title.

Only a few minutes into the match, Johnny Spade and Kanyon attacked Nick Dinsmore, hoping to ensure that the OVW title would stay with The Revolution in a one-on-one match between Damaja and Doug Basham. Within a couple of minutes, though, Dinsmore was back in the ring and taking charge. Damaja and Basham, longtime tag team partners, double-teamed Dinsmore. Soon they pounded their goateed foe into the mat.

Unfortunately for The Revolution, Damaja and Basham disagreed on who would pin Dinsmore. As a fistfight broke out between the two of them, Dinsmore seized the opening to suplex Damaja into a pinning position and score the three-count. Damaja and Basham blamed each other for letting the Ohio Valley championship slip from their collective grasp.

As it turned out, the disagreement led Damaja to quit The Revolution and feud with Basham in Ohio Valley. Within a few months, however, Damaja patched up his differences with Basham—sort of—to the point that he changed his name to *Danny* Basham.

The Basham Brothers made their *Smackdown* debut in June, although they somehow remained enemies in OVW.

THE HALF-YEAR

47. WWE FINALLY BEATS THE WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE

More than one year after their decade-long legal battle forced the World Wrestling Federation to change its name to World Wrestling Entertainment, WWE finally scored a legal victory over the World Wide Fund For Nature in an English Court of Appeals.

In its effort to wipe out every use of the "WWF" acronym by World Wrestling Entertainment, the Fund succeeded in having a high court block the sale of classic THQ/Jakks video games that included the old "WWF" scratch logo. This occurred at the worst possible time for WWE, only a few weeks before Christmas. On April 7, however, the Court of Appeals judge ruled that the video games did not infringe upon the Fund's use of the "WWF" acronym.

Said WWE CEO Linda McMahon: "We have never done a thing to damage [the Fund], but they have done nothing but try to damage us ... Now they will have to pay what looks to be in excess of $100,000 in legal fees (incurred by WWE and THQ/Jakks) caused by this latest episode, no doubt from monies raised from the public for other purposes."

More importantly, WWE attorneys hoped this could be a legal opening that would apply to the sale of vintage videotapes and merchandise, and any other property predating the 2002 name change. The major rift between the two sides occurred when the Fund accused the former Federation of violating a 1994 agreement restricting its use of the "WWF" acronym to North America.

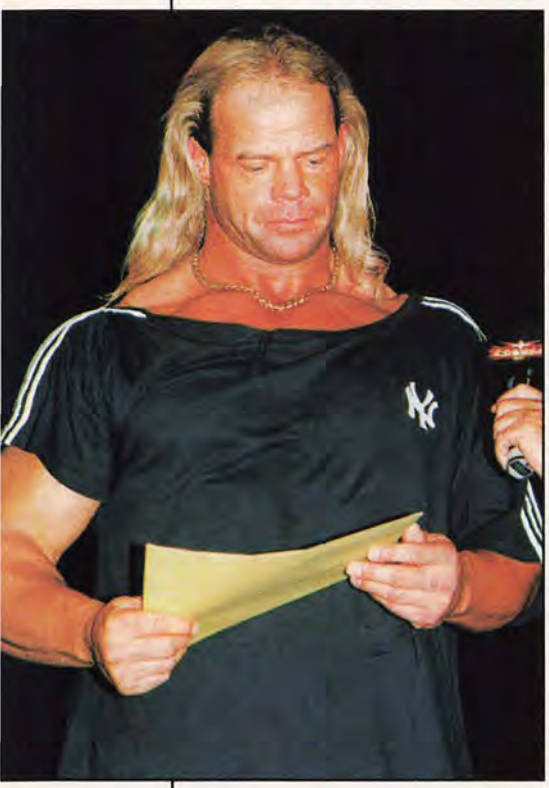
48. SAMOA JOE'S ROH TITLE VICTORY TOPS "NIGHT OF CHAMPIONS"

Fans at the Murphy Recreational Center in Philadelphia were thrilled when Samoa Joe defeated Xavier for the Ring of Honor title at the promotion's "Night Of Champions" event. Samoa Joe won the championship in a very convincing manner, choking out Xavier near the 12-minute mark.

Xavier had become increasingly cocky since beating Low-Ki for the belt in September 2002, while Joe had gained a considerable following on the ROH circuit in recent months, despite being primarily a West Coast star. But that wasn't the only news coming out of the title bout. Immediately before the match, Michael Shane—who had been at the hospital due to dehydration and a stomach virus—nailed Christopher Daniels with a superkick as C.W. Anderson punched Allison Danger with a vicious left hand. It marked the beginning of the long-anticipated feud between the hated Prophecy, led by Daniels, and The Group, which included Shane, Samoa Joe, Anderson, Steve Corino, and Jack Victory.

Among the other matches at the Night of Champions, Colt Cabana and Raven defeated C.M. Punk and Ace Steel; Low-Ki beat Jody Fleisch, Ring of Honor tag team champions A.J. Styles and Red defeated The Briscoe Brothers; The Carnage Crew beat Hotstuff Hernandez and Mase; Samoa Joe, C.W. Anderson and Jack Victory went to a brutal no-contest with Da Hit Squad and Homicide; and Doug Williams defeated Christopher Daniels for the U.K.-based Frontier Wrestling Alliance title and to become the top contender to the ROH singles belt.

49. LEX LUGER ARRESTED FOR ILLEGAL DRUG POSSESSION



While police quickly removed the cloud of suspicion over Lex Luger regarding Elizabeth's death on May 1, they did report uncovering more than 1,700 pills in his townhome in Cobb County, Georgia, leading to the former WCW World champion's arrest on charges of illegal drug possession on the same day. The investigation yielded 14 drug possession counts, 13 of which were felonies.

According to Atlanta's WSB-TV, the drugs that warranted felonies included Xanax (an anti-anxiety drug), OxyContin, anabolic steroids, testosterone, and hydrocodone. The misdemeanor count pertained to the sale and distribution of Saizen, a synthetic growth hormone. Luger, whose real name is Lawrence Pfohl, was released on $25,000 bond.

Luger's arrest immediately following Elizabeth's death was his third brush with the law within a two-week period. On Easter Sunday, police responded to a domestic disturbance call at Luger's home and, according to the report, Elizabeth suffered a bruise above and a contusion below her left eye, and her right eye was swollen. Although Elizabeth first claimed that a dog had caused the marks, she then admitted that Luger was responsible, and he was arrested for misdemeanor battery. He was later released on $2,500 bond for that incident.

Only two days later, on April 21, Luger ran his Porsche into another car and was arrested and charged with driving under the influence of alcohol. Luger's legal problems made a lot of headlines in Atlanta, where he is known for his pro wrestling exploits and as owner of the Main Event Fitness Club.

50. BRET HART ADDRESSES FANS AT WWA PAY-PER-VIEW

Bret Hart made his first appearance in front of a live crowd on pay-per-view since suffering a stroke nearly a year earlier at World Wrestling All-Stars' "The Reckoning." Hart addressed the fans just prior to the unification bout between NWA champion Jeff Jarrett and WWA champion Sting.

Hart was given a minute-long ovation at the May 25 event, which took place at the North Shore Events Centre in Auckland, New Zealand. He then pulled up a stool in the ring and shared his thoughts about the past year in his life. "When [WWA promoter] Andrew McManus called me a few months ago, I was happy to know that I'd recovered enough that I thought I could come down here and do this ... Yesterday was the four-year anniversary of the death of my brother Owen. And I know my brother Owen would be very proud to see me sitting here right now talking to you people. It's been a tough year in wrestling. Lost some good friends. Lost the 'British Bulldog' this past year. Also lost 'Mr. Perfect' Curt Hennig. And we recently lost Miss Elizabeth.

"I just want to say that they're all decent people, and we're going to miss them ... When I was in the hospital and when I had my stroke, I got e-mails from all over the world. I got them from fans here in New Zealand. I got them from places like Iraq and Russia and the Philippines ... 'The Hitman' was not just some wrestling character created in a boardroom by marketers or writers. I'm happy to tell you that I'm a real person."

Hart's WWA appearance gave rise to speculation that he would be willing to repair his relationship with Vince McMahon and agree to at least a one-night farewell in WWE.

THE WACKY AND WEIRD

WHEN A SEVENTYSOMETHING-year-old woman strips down to a lacy black thong and publicly straddles the face of a high-ranking executive for all of us to watch on pay-per-view ... well, that's pretty weird.

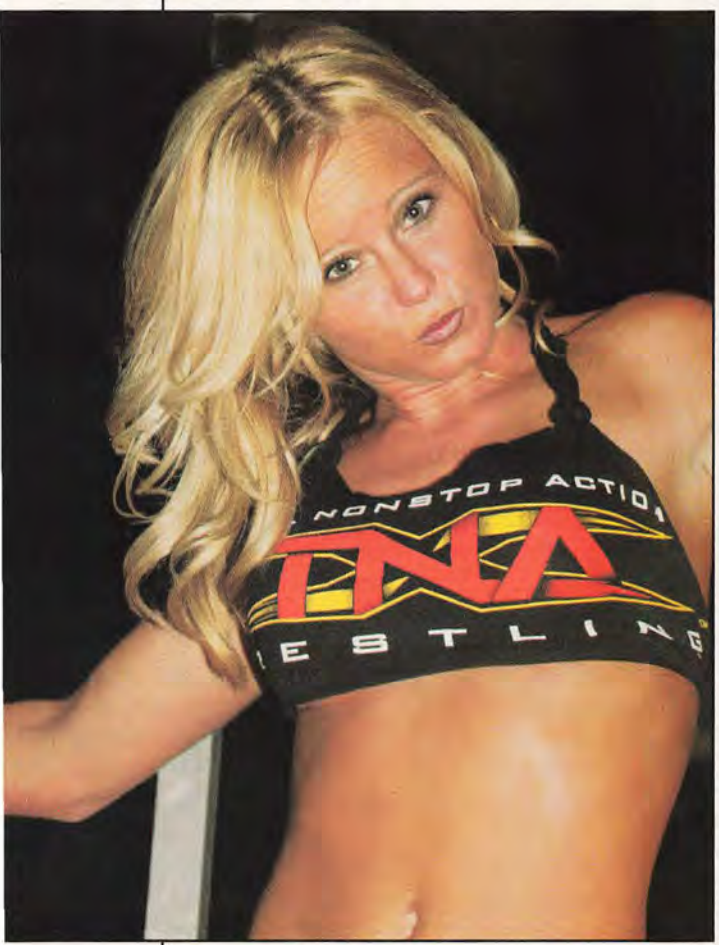
*But in the world of pro wrestling, even an occasional Mae Young striptease doesn't look completely out of place. As Vince McMahon is so fond of saying, "Anything can happen in WWE." As we all know, sometimes that's a good thing, and other times, it can be a very, **very** bad thing. And since WWE is the promotion virtually every other promotion wants to emulate, you can expect to see just about anything these days, regardless of promotional boundaries. Even in Japan, where WWE-style sports entertainment is condemned in many circles, weird and wacky stuff abounds.*

Pro wrestling is the only profession in the world in which you can claim to be from parts unknown, or in which bludgeoning men with a sledgehammer earns you a world championship instead of a one-way ticket to the electric chair. Let's face it, wrestling just wouldn't be wrestling without the outrageous, the bizarre, and the downright wacky.

How weird and wacky were the first six months of 2003? Judge for yourself.

Mae needs to keep it on!

▶ Eric Bischoff learned the hard way that he couldn't beat Steve Austin in a wrestling match, but he had no problem accepting Austin's challenge to take part in a triathalon. Make that a *"Redneck* Triathalon," comprised of a belching contest, a pie-eating contest, and a pigpen contest. Somewhere in there, there was some bad singing, too. Bischoff was no match for "The Bionic Redneck" and ended up knee-deep in pig slop for his efforts. The ongoing saga dominated the Bad Blood PPV. (That was a bad thing!)



We saw a whole lotta Lollipop

▶ Technically, Mae Young's striptease was part of the aforementioned "Redneck Triathalon," but based on the sheer weirdness of that event, it deserves its own entry. The sight of a thong-wearing Young giving the old DX crotch chop as she measured Bischoff for a bronco buster was enough to counteract the effects of a Viagra overdose. We don't condone Austin hitting Mae with a stunner, but we were just happy to see that segment end.

▶ While on the subject of public nudity, NWA-TNA at least gave the fans what they wanted when Lollipop had her top pulled off during a catfight. A true scrapper, Lollipop kept on fighting, even as Jeremy Borash rushed to cover her up. Where was Borash when the Mae Young thing was going down?

▶ Things had been going pretty good for Xtreme Pro Wrestling—that is, until April 8. That's when XPW's parent company, Xtreme Associates, was raided by the FBI and postal inspectors. A 10-page warrant called for the seizure of records, video, and model releases for five adult movies produced by the company. The charge? The company was being investigated on the possibility that it used underage models in adult films. The lesson? Porn and wrestling just don't mix.

THE WACKY

What did Sable sue for again?

▶ When Hiromichi "Kodo" Fuyuki challenged Shinya Hashimoto, claiming it could be the last match of his career, fans might have thought he was just trying to build up the match. Nope. Eight days after making the cryptic remark, Fuyuki died from cancer. At least he wasn't guilty of superfluous hype.

▶ Four years after levying a $110-million lawsuit against Vince McMahon and the WWF for allegedly coercing her into storylines and situations she found morally objectionable (including public nudity and a lesbian storyline), Sable returned to WWE. Within weeks, she was kissing Torrie Wilson and flashing her bare breasts at Mr. America to distract him in an arm-wrestling match against Vince McMahon. Morals, shmorals—a diva needs her cash.

His speeches must be, um, interesting

▶ The Al Wilson and Dawn Marie was romance straight from the *Jerry Springer* set, especially once Dawn got Torrie involved in the fun. But when Dawn Marie accidentally, *um*, loved the old man to death, Torrie took time off from mourning to avenge dear old Daddy at the Royal Rumble. Surprisingly, the divas wrestled a (somewhat) scientific match, though grieving widow Dawn Marie wore a black veil, and not much else.

▶ WWF superstar The Ultimate Warrior went on a tour of sorts, but he wasn't wrestling any matches. Throughout the spring, Warrior accepted speaking engagements at several colleges. His topic was his conservative ideology and personal political beliefs. Unfortunately, he didn't wear his face paint and arm tassels on the speaking tour.

▶ South Florida indy wrestler Bobby Rogers (real name Michael Rapuano) was arrested and charged with writing a bad check to pay for $9,500 worth of DVDs, VHS tapes, and other merchandise. Rapuano previously offered to cut off a finger for a spot on the ECW roster and once tried to sell a kidney on eBay. Earlier this year, fellow indy wrestler Dave Johnson claimed Rapuano applied for a credit card in his name, to which Rapuano later responded, "I'm not that stupid." Okay.

AND WEIRD

You're Antonio Inoki. You have the opportunity to book matches featuring Jushin Liger, the legendary junior heavyweight high-flyer who helped establish cruiserweight wrestling in the U.S. Whom do you book Liger against? If you're Inoki, the answer would be Pancrase fighter Minoru Suzuki in a UFC-style shootfight. Liger lasted less than two minutes before getting choked out in an embarrassing bout.

The Jones experiment bombed

WrestleMania XIX was supposed to be Nathan Jones' coming out party. Unfortunately, WWE matchmakers determined the ex-convict wasn't quite ready for prime time. He ended up making a brief run-in during Undertaker's match against A-Train and The Big Show, then vanished from WWE without a trace soon thereafter. We know … you didn't realize he was gone.

Synn's not Bradshaw's type

Chris Jericho apparently never forgot being snubbed by Goldberg in WCW. Shortly after Goldberg signed with WWE, the two had an altercation backstage at *Raw*. According to most reports, Jericho took Goldberg down before the two were separated. "Maybe Goldberg should come up to Calgary and spend some time with Stu in the Dungeon learning how to wrestle," wrote Bret Hart in his column in the *Calgary Sun* in reference to his father's training facility.

Bradshaw should get a job as a judge on *Am I Hot?* In assessing OVW's Synn, Bradshaw stated there wasn't "enough Jim Beam in Kentucky" to make her look good. He's probably right.

The Superpowers had a breakup and reunited, and no one really knows why. Months after Nikita Koloff turned against Dusty Rhodes in NWA-TNA, Koloff helped Rhodes beat Brian Lawler in a ladder match. Koloff was gone and the whole thing was forgotten by the following week.

Piper can explain!

A few months after showing up in NWA-TNA and running down a lot of people in wrestling in a rambling diatribe (it included controversial comments about Owen Hart and Vince Russo), Piper showed up in WWE. Accused of being a hypocrite by many, Piper spoke out on wwe.com, saying, "What I said was that Vince McMahon is sick—equating it to the sickness that I talk about in [my autobiography]—and that he is all-consumed. They were doing necrophilia and Grandma's [breasts] were being shown and two guys were getting married … If you're going to do that [stuff], I ain't interested. But that's all gone all of a sudden. Okay. Then I don't have a problem with it." Glad he cleared that up for us. □

TOP 10 RAW/SMACKDOWN

RAW

10. YOU'RE WELCOME! Winning *Tough Enough* doesn't make you a professional wrestler—it makes you the winner of a reality-based professional wrestling game show. Matt Cappotelli and John Hennigan, the winners of *Tough Enough III,* received that message loud and clear when, on January 27, Tommy Dreamer welcomed them to WWE with a pair of awfully stiff Singapore cane shots.

Welcome aboard, guys!

9. A SHOCKING DEVELOPMENT On February 3, Raw champion Triple-H, Ric Flair, Randy Orton, and Batista formed Evolution, a Four Horsemen-esque clique if there ever was one. Later in the night, Evolution flexed its newfound muscle when Orton and Batista attacked Goldust by throwing him into a backstage power area, electrocuting him in the process.

8. AN UNDERSTATED TRIBUTE Wrestling isn't known for honoring its fallen heroes, of which there are far too many. However, on February 17, that changed when Chris Jericho, in the midst of a backstage skit, swatted a piece of chewing gum in a powerful if subtle tribute to the late Curt Hennig, who died only seven days earlier.

7. "DA MAN" DEBUTS Rumors had been flying about Bill Goldberg possibly signing with WWE ever since the company bought WCW way back in the spring of 2001. On March 31, those rumors were finally put to rest, because on that night, the former WCW World champion debuted in WWE by climbing into the ring with The Rock and spearing him into the mat.

6. HOLY UPSET OF ALL UPSETS! Prior to The Rock's return to WWE in the winter, The Rock and The Hurricane had little in common other than their profession and their decision to use "The" as their first name. On March 10, that changed when they wrestled their first-ever one-on-one match. Thanks to a little help from "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin, Hurricane walked away with the upset win. *Whatsupwiddat?*

5. ONE MORE TIME After beating Raw General Manager Eric Bischoff in a match at the No Way Out pay-per-view, "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin returned to non-PPV WWE TV for the first time in nearly nine months on March 3. Austin delivered a short promo before fighting off Three Minute Warning and nearly catching The Rock with a stunner. The short confrontation marked the rebirth of one of WWE's greatest rivalries.

Rock on, Rock!

4. THE LAST STRAW In an attempt to avoid hearing Vince McMahon scream, "You're fired!" into his ear, Raw General Manager Eric Bischoff traveled to Texas on February 3 in order to try to sign "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin for Raw. After missing Austin at home and in two different saloons, a stressed out Bischoff walloped a poor bar patron in the face with a beer mug.

3. BEER BASH When Bill Goldberg debuted, a number of WWE fans and wrestlers didn't take an immediate liking to him—and that left WWE officials with quite the quandary: How were they going to get the big guy over? "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin's May 5 beer bash, during which he drank beer after beer with "Da Man" was, in essence, Goldberg's WWE christening.

2. THE ROCK CONCERT We know that The Rock is the self-proclaimed most electrifying man in sports and entertainment—we just never knew how far he'd go to prove it. On March 24, Rock stretched his vocal cords when he entered the ring and sang a couple of disparaging songs about "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin. Fortunately, Austin stopped the concert by attacking The Rock and stomping the hell out of his guitar. That didn't stop Rock from conducting Rock Concert II a few weeks later.

1. HE'S BACK Anyone who knows Steve Austin's history knows that he has never taken kindly to management, which is ironic, because on April 28, that's exactly what he became when Linda McMahon introduced him as Raw's new co-general manager. Austin shook hands with Eric Bischoff, but then gave him a stunner after he reminded him that he didn't officially begin his duties until the following morning. □

MOMENTS OF THE HALF-YEAR

SMACKDOWN

10. BET SHANE DOUGLAS WAS WATCHING On March 4, Paul Heyman, the former head of Extreme Championship Wrestling, got extreme himself when he entered the ring (in a suit, no less!) for a cage match against his former client, Brock Lesnar. Despite the best attempts of Kurt Angle, Charlie Haas, and Shelton Benjamin, Lesnar won the match after delivering a wicked F5.

9. THE PUNCH HEARD 'ROUND THE WORLD Stephanie McMahon is a bold woman with strong opinions, and when she sees an opportunity to make Smackdown better, she goes for it. On January 21, Steph reintroduced Hulk Hogan to Smackdown's roster. For her efforts, Steph got to watch Hogan rear back and coldcock her irate father, Vince McMahon, in the middle of the ring.

8. CENA STEPS UP Brock Lesnar may be WWE's most intimidating champion ever, but that didn't stop hard-rapping John Cena from stepping up and challenging "The Next Big Thing" for a match on February 4. Cena grabbed a live microphone and mocked the big man's nickname with a jaw-dropping line: "You want the next big thing?" Well, even if you didn't see the show, you probably can figure out where he was going …

Zach Gowen with Hulk, er, Mr. America

7. BLOODY AND BLOODLESS Vince McMahon is known for being a ruthless businessman, and on March 18, he proved that to be the case once again. Prior to his contract signing with Hulk Hogan for their match at WrestleMania XIX, McMahon attacked Hogan from behind, opened a gash on his face, and forced him to sign the contract in his own blood.

6. APRIL FOOLS—NOT! On April 1, the wrestling industry proved once again why fans should never say never. On that day, former WWE diva Sable, who angrily parted ways with the company in 1999 and later sued it for $110-million, returned to WWE TV by interrupting Torrie Wilson's *Playboy* coming-out party and giving the centerfold a kiss. All we could do was shake our heads in bewilderment.

5. MR. AMERICA Now, we're not going to tell you that Vince McMahon is right and Mr. America *definitely* is Hulk Hogan in disguise (where's the official proof?), but we have to admit that was our immediate impression when the red, white, and blue-clad wrestler debuted for Smackdown on April 29. There was just something so familiar about the way he said "brother" and flexed his "patriots" that had us wondering.

4. TWO SECONDS SHORT On February 25, Stephanie McMahon told Smackdown hopeful Brian "Spanky" Kendrick that if he could last five minutes in the ring with Kurt Angle, he'd be awarded a Smackdown contract. He lasted 4:58. In spite of the loss, Kendrick earned our respect, because the match was one of the best Smackdown bouts of the half-year. And a couple of weeks later, he did earn the contract.

So close, Brian!

3. WELCOME BACK Even though he is one of the most talented WWE wrestlers ever, Kurt Angle has had a hard time winning over fans. They just love to hate him too much! However, on June 3, Angle—who had been missing in action ever since WrestleMania XIX because of neck surgery—became WWE's most popular wrestler (at least for the evening). Watching him embrace Smackdown champ Brock Lesnar was something special.

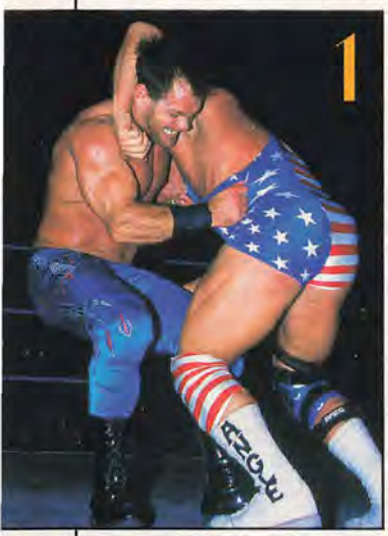
2. NUPTIALS, *SMACKDOWN*-STYLE When looking back at wrestling history, there have been some ridiculously odd couples (Jesse Ventura and Adrian Adonis, Luna Vachon and Gangrel, and Goldylocks and her microphone, just to name a few), but Smackdown's pairing of Dawn Marie and Al Wilson might be the oddest ever. On January 2, when they stripped to their skivvies and got married in the ring, half of us laughed while the rest of us got sick.

1. JUST PLAIN WRONG On May 13, Mr. America handed his American flag to a "fan" at ringside before entering the ring for Roddy Piper's weekly "Piper's Pit" segment. When Piper attacked Mr. America, the fan (Zach "Tenacious Z" Gowen) who was handed the flag jumped the rail to come to Mr. America's defense. Piper attacked the youngster, and in doing so, pulled off his prosthetic leg. □

TOP 20 PPV MATCH

1. CHRIS BENOIT VS. KURT ANGLE (ROYAL RUMBLE)

The matches between Angle and Benoit remind us of why we became wrestling fans in the first place, and their 2003 Royal Rumble showdown was their best to date.



Chris Benoit vs. Kurt Angle

Referee Mike Chioda got the match started on a positive note when he tossed Shelton Benjamin and Charlie Haas from ringside, ensuring this would be a one-on-one confrontation. "The Crippler" immediately targeted Angle's knee, but the Smackdown champion started wearing down Benoit in the corner. Benoit flattened Angle with a DDT on the ring apron, but missed a flying headbutt, allowing Angle to move in for an Olympic slam. Benoit countered the attempt and locked Angle in a sharpshooter, but Angle—bleeding from the mouth—made it to the ropes.

The fans soon realized this was no ordinary match. Benoit and Angle were so familiar with each other's moves and weaknesses that they seamlessly shifted from move to countermove. This wasn't going to end on a fluke move or ref bump; this was a game of human chess by two masters.

Benoit and Angle traded vicious German, belly-to-belly, and back suplexes, but neither would stay down. Angle caught Benoit with an overhead throw off the top rope, and Benoit retaliated with the crossface. With the title within reach, Benoit clamped the hold on as the champion exhausted counter after counter in an effort to put Benoit's shoulders on the mat. Finally, at the 18:30 mark, Angle rolled to his knees and locked Benoit in an anklelock that he turned into a heel hook. When Benoit finally tapped at 19:45, he and Angle were given a standing ovation by the fans.

Not even a month into 2003, the top contender for Match of the Year had already taken place.

2. SHAWN MICHAELS VS. CHRIS JERICHO (WRESTLEMANIA XIX)

The showdown between Y2J and HBK exceeded its hype (which was strong) and stole the show at WrestleMania. Even though Michaels came out on top, Jericho had many close near-falls and showed he was Michaels' equal. Michaels might not have passed the proverbial torch on this night, but Jericho proved he was the man who should get it down the road.

3. KURT ANGLE VS. BROCK LESNAR (WRESTLEMANIA XIX)

The long-awaited clash between Lesnar and Angle was hampered just a bit by Angle's neck injury. Angle showed plenty of guts in simply going through with it, but he smartly wrestled a conservative match. Lesnar's shooting star press was stunning, but his head-first crash landing was terrifying. Both were lucky to escape serious injury.

4. RAVEN VS. JEFF JARRETT (APRIL 30)

Raven vs. Jeff Jarrett

The ultimate battle of old school tradition and extreme hardcore was also Jarrett's battle for respect. He took everything Raven could dish out and came out with the NWA title still strapped around his waist. In the most highly anticipated match in TNA's 10-month history, Jarrett proved he was a worthy champion.

5. EDDIE GUERRERO AND TAJIRI VS. TEAM ANGLE (JUDGMENT DAY)

Tajiri may have been a last-minute replacement for Chavo Guerrero Jr., but he and Eddie showed veteran chemistry against Charlie Haas and Shelton Benjamin. Tajiri's stiff offense was enough to keep Team Angle off their game, allowing he and Eddie to claim the Smackdown tag title in an exciting ladder match.

6. A.J. STYLES VS. RAVEN (HARDCORE LADDER MATCH, MARCH 19)

A title shot against Jeff Jarrett was at stake in this hardcore ladder match. Styles quickly adapted to the hardcore style, battering Raven with trash cans and the ladder. Raven took over with the help of a staple gun, driving a pair of staples into Styles' head. After Glenn Gilberti power-bombed Styles through a table, a bloody Raven slowly climbed the ladder to claim his title shot.

7. LOS GUERREROS VS. TEAM ANGLE (BACKLASH)

Team Angle dedicated this match to their injured captain, Kurt Angle, and Kurt had to like what he saw. Shelton Benjamin and Charlie Haas kept Eddie Guerrero isolated for most of the match, wearing him down with a variety of holds and moves. When the fresh Chavo came in, Benjamin tripped him and held his feet, allowing Charlie to steal the win. The best old-fashioned tag match of the half-year.

8. ROYAL RUMBLE MATCH (ROYAL RUMBLE)

Brock Lesnar had to beat The Big Show just for a slot in the match. It came down to Lesnar, Kane, Batista, and Un-

ES OF THE HALF-YEAR

dertaker. Lesnar answered critics by nailing Kane with an F5 and surviving a tombstone piledriver to toss 'Taker and win. Chris Jericho and Matt Hardy also turned in impressive performances.

9. SHARK BOY VS. JOEL MAXIMO VS. JOSE MAXIMO VS. JIMMY RAVE VS. TONY MAMALUKE VS. DAVID YOUNG VS. PAUL LONDON VS. JERRY LYNN, NWA-TNA X TITLE NUMBER-ONE CONTENDER MATCH (FEBRUARY 12)

Because TNA runs weekly pay-per-views, its individual events are somewhat less meaningful than those in WWE, making it difficult to single out a particular match. But this eight-man elimination X division top contender match could not be overlooked. Lynn came out on top, last eliminating London with a cradle piledriver.

10. HULK HOGAN VS. VINCE MCMAHON (WRESTLEMANIA XIX)

It was billed as a match 20 years in the making, and it was arguably the most intriguing match of the half-year. Surprisingly, Vince mounted a real challenge to the "Hulkster" and nearly scored the pinfall. In the end, not even the surprise interference of Roddy Piper could save Mr. McMahon.

11. RIC FLAIR VS. SHAWN MICHAELS (BAD BLOOD)

Michaels seemed to have the match in hand when he locked Ric Flair in the figure-four. But he made the critical mistake of trying to be flashy when it wasn't necessary. HBK put Flair through a table at ringside, but he left himself open for an attack by Randy Orton. The dirtiest player in the game found yet another way to win.

12. JAZZ VS. TRISH STRATUS VS. VICTORIA (WRESTLEMANIA XIX)

These three women deserve a round of applause for consistently delivering exciting matches and revamping the long-suffering women's division. Stratus was the underdog against the bigger and stronger Jazz and Victoria, but she hung with the heels and came out with the belt.

Jazz vs. Trish Stratus

13. KID KASH VS. JERRY LYNN (APRIL 2)

Kash, favoring an injured knee, wrestled the match without valet Trinity in his corner. He hit the former X champion with a slingshot huracanrana and moonsault, but Lynn would not stay down. Lynn came back with a spinebuster and a near-fall after blocking a huracanrana attempt with a power bomb. Kash, however, scored the pin after outside interference.

14. CHRIS JERICHO VS. JEFF HARDY (NO WAY OUT)

Hardy wrestled one of the biggest singles matches of his career against Y2J. Jeff blocked a lionsault and nearly won the match with a tremendous whisper in the wind off the top rope. After Hardy hit a swanton bomb, Jericho got his foot on the rope at the last moment. He finally took the win with the Walls of Jericho.

15. TRIPLE H VS. KEVIN NASH (BAD BLOOD)

Triple-H unloaded on Nash with a hammer, wooden crate, and his barbed-wire bat until Nash hit him with a snake eyes on the bat in this "Hell In A Cell" showdown. Guest ref Mick Foley took plenty of abuse, too, and all three men stained the mat with their blood. Once again, Triple-H came out on top, courtesy of his sledgehammer.

16. THE ROCK VS. HULK HOGAN (NO WAY OUT)

This second encounter between "The Great One" and the "Hulkster" can't compare to their 2002 classic, but it still delivered thrills. This time out, Rock was the heel, and Hogan was feeding off the energy of 20,000 "Hulkamaniacs." However, Vince McMahon wasn't about to let Hogan beat Rock. And he didn't.

17. BILLY KIDMAN VS. MATT HARDY (NO WAY OUT)

Hardy made the most of his cruiserweight title shot after spending weeks trying to make weight. He hit a legdrop followed by a powerslam and a choke to weaken Kidman. Hardy then worked the champ over with a sleeper and more powerslams until Kidman rallied with an enzuigiri. A powerful twist of fate sealed the win for Hardy.

18. MATT HARDY VS. REY MISTERIO JR. (WRESTLEMANIA XIX)

Ever since he debuted in WCW in 1996, Misterio has been the measuring stick for all cruiserweights. Most fans thought Rey would have no trouble with Matt Hardy. Rey looked good, hitting a corkscrew plancha early, but Hardy had him well-scouted. Hardy avoided the West Coast pop and won by pinfall.

19. THE UNDERTAKER VS. THE BIG SHOW (BACKLASH)

The slobberknocker of the half-year! The brawl began outside the ring, but Undertaker asserted control in the ring. Show fought back with a suplex followed by a series of elbows and a bearhug. 'Taker battled back and attempted a last ride. When that didn't work, he surprised the giant with a Dragon sleeper for a submission victory.

20. TRIPLE-H VS. BOOKER T (WRESTLEMANIA XIX)

"The Cerebral Assassin" wrestled a brilliant match, injuring Booker's knee and controlling the pace. Triple-H showed flashes of the technical proficiency—particularly his use of the Indian deathlock—and ruthless aggression that made him "The Game" in 2000. His offense was like neutral zone trap in the NHL—ugly but effective. □

WRESTLER OF THE HALF-YEAR BROCK LESNAR

Brock Lesnar began 2003 looking for revenge. He wanted revenge on former agent Paul Heyman, who sold him out after claiming to have his best interests at heart. He wanted revenge on The Big Show, who stole Lesnar's Smackdown championship thanks in large part to interference from Heyman. And, most of all, Lesnar wanted revenge on Kurt Angle, the ultimate beneficiary of Heyman's deviousness and the man who ended 2002 with *Lesnar's* title around *his* waist.

Yes, entering 2003, Lesnar wanted revenge, and he wanted it in a very big, very bloody way.

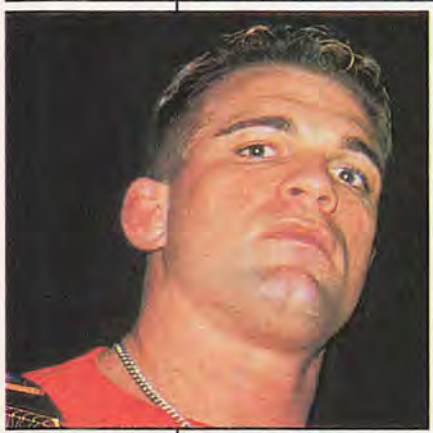
It didn't take Lesnar long to start pursuing his goals. On January 19, he scored a crucial victory over The Big Show at the Royal Rumble pay-per-view—despite Heyman's constant interference. That win entered him into the 30-man battle royal for a number-one contendership, which he won by last eliminating The Undertaker. A WrestleMania shot at Kurt Angle's Smackdown gold was then his.

However, before Lesnar locked up with Angle at WrestleMania, he got even with Heyman by securing a cage match against him on March 4. After fighting off Team Angle, Lesnar F5'd Heyman for the win. After that match, Heyman was no longer an issue in Lesnar's quest.

Lesnar's final act of revenge came at WrestleMania XIX, as he defeated Angle to regain his Smackdown championship. A botched shooting star press attempt—which saw Lesnar land awkwardly on his head—couldn't even stop the big man's momentum that night, and after the gripping match was over, Angle and Lesnar embraced in a moving sign of sportsmanship and, perhaps, friendship.

In the months that followed, Lesnar defended his title proudly—and strongly. He fought off men like Matt Hardy, A-Train, John Cena, and even The Big Show again, and now we're wondering if anybody on Smackdown's roster has even a fighting chance of beating him in a fair match.

TAG TEAM OF THE HALF-YEAR TEAM ANGLE



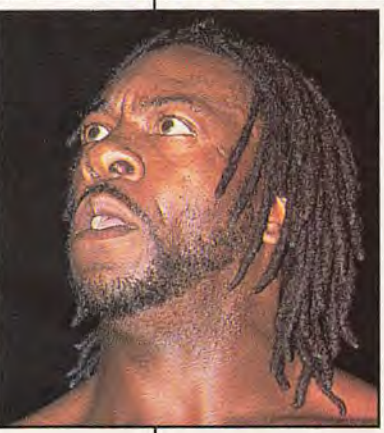
Tag team wrestling might not be in the middle of a renaissance (we're still a far cry from the level of tag team wrestling that was going on in the 1980s), but it's fair to say that because of NWA-TNA and WWE's brand extension, a number of quality tag teams are getting opportunities to shine—and that's why picking the best tag team of the half-year was so darn difficult this time around. Eddie Guerrero and Chavo Guerrero Jr., Eddie Guerrero and Tajiri, Rob Van Dam and Kane, The Dudley Boyz, Chris Harris and James Storm, and William Regal and Lance Storm were all contenders for this half-year's prize, but when it came right down to it, none of them was stronger than the team we love to hate—Team Angle: Charlie Haas and Shelton Benjamin.

Now, we're not arguing that Team Angle blew the doors off tag team wrestling as we know it. They didn't. At times they looked like the WWE rookies they are, they often needed the help of Paul Heyman or Kurt Angle, and they repeatedly retained their title under less-than-honorable conditions. However, what they did do was rather remarkable: They held the Smackdown championship for more than three months while making frequent defenses against more experienced teams such as Chris Benoit and Rhyno and Los Guerreros. Granted, they also lost their share of non-title bouts (including an upset defeat to Rey Misterio Jr. and Tajiri), but those losses are forgivable, because champions don't *have to* win non-title bouts—they only have to win the matches in which their belts are on the line.

If Chavo Guerrero Jr. hadn't gotten injured and Los Guerreros had defeated Team Angle for the championship, our decision might have been different, but timing is everything in situations such as these, and this time, timing dictated that Team Angle walk away with this honor.

AR AWARDS

MOST POPULAR WRESTLER OF THE HALF-YEAR BOOKER T



Booker T hasn't been handed anything in his life. If he has received something, it's because he has gone out and earned it, and 2003's Most Popular Wrestler of the Half-Year Award is no different. The fans don't cheer him because he says he's cool (he can be kinda geeky at times), because he's the champion (obviously), or because he hangs out with the right people (his best friend is Goldust). The fans cheer Booker T for two reasons:

Every time he steps inside the ring, he gives 110 percent.

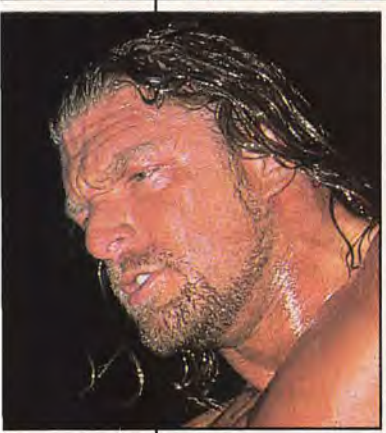
Every time he wins a match, he does it with style, and he lets the fans know that he won it for them.

An award of this kind has been a long time in coming for Booker T. As one of the last remaining main-eventers in WCW who genuinely cared about the fans, he wrestled each match like it was the main event of Starrcade (remember that name from the past?) and returned from injuries as soon as he was able (unlike many of his fellow main-eventers). When WCW finally went under, blame could have been assigned to any number of people, but Booker T was one of the very few who was absolutely clean.

When Booker made the transition from WCW to WWE, he had a hard time of it. The fans didn't immediately take to him, and he responded by rejecting them outright. Oddly enough, it wasn't until Booker began partnering with Goldust that his popularity once again took off. Goldust brought out the best in Booker, and when Booker stepped up to face Triple-H at WrestleMania XIX, he had the fans solidly in his corner. Unfortunately, Triple-H had Ric Flair in his corner, and Booker came up a pinfall short of the Raw championship.

No matter. Booker T doesn't need championship gold to be popular. All he needs is to do is show off his heart.

MOST HATED WRESTLER OF THE HALF-YEAR TRIPLE-H



There are a lot of reasons why Triple-H is taking this award home with him this year:

He's a cheater. He tried to split Scott Steiner's head open with his sledgehammer during their match at the Royal Rumble, used his title belt to knock out Steiner during their rematch at No Way Out, utilized major interference from Ric Flair against Booker T during their match at WrestleMania, and got himself disqualified in his match against Kevin Nash at Judgment Day by assaulting the referee. He doesn't play fair.

He's crude. In the weeks leading up to his WrestleMania match with Booker T, Triple-H played the race card by calling Booker's hair "nappy" and by telling Booker that people like him don't wrestle for championships. Helmsley also said that Booker wasn't in his class and instead of being his opponent, he should be his limousine driver. Absolutely classless.

He utilizes gang warfare. Triple-H's Evolution group, which formed at the beginning of the year during his feud with Steiner, is nothing more than a clique designed to keep the Raw championship around his waist through intimidation and the occasional mugging.

He's endorsed. Watching Triple-H parade Ric Flair around with him week after week—just so Flair can tell us all how great Helmsley is—is damn depressing. What's worse is that their relationship has turned Flair, perhaps wrestling's greatest ever, into a glorified shill much of the time.

Despite all of the above, perhaps the biggest reason Triple-H was wrestling's most hated man was that he was wrestling's most successful man. Success breeds jealousy, and as we all know, jealousy breeds contempt.

From January through June, a lot of people were jealous of Triple-H.

THE MID-YEAR G

WHILE GRADE SCHOOLS, high schools, and colleges wrap up classes in May or June, professional wrestling runs on a much different schedule. The sport's semester stretches all the way from January 1 to December 31, and there aren't any significant breaks in between to give the wrestlers an extended rest. It's a rigorous business, and only the strongest survive. So, remember, even those wrestlers who earn "Ds" and "Fs" are some of the toughest hombres around. More than likely, they are simply struggling. Nothing more, nothing less.

THEY GET AN "A"

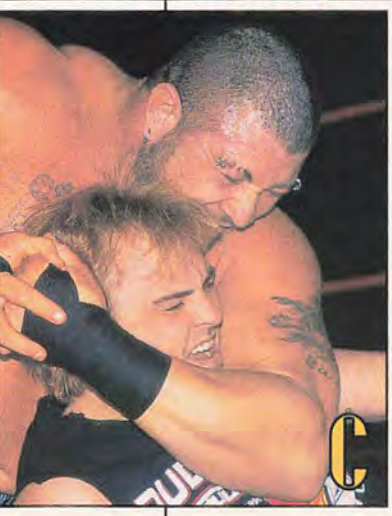
Brock Lesnar went from being a rookie WWE monster to the most intimidating WWE champion in many years ... **Triple-H** was underhanded and not very popular, but he dominated Raw and was the brand's champion for the entire six-month grading period ... **Chris Jericho** was never really in Raw's championship picture, but he was the brand's most valuable player thanks to his ability to juggle multiple feuds at once ... **Kurt Angle** may not have been Smackdown's most likable wrestler, but when he wrestled Lesnar at WrestleMania despite a *very* serious neck injury, he gained everyone's respect ... **The Rock**, returning as a Hollywood heel, was as entertaining as he's ever been and breathed great life into the Raw brand during his stay ... **John Cena** was the breakout star of this grading period ... **Booker T** came up short in his hunt for Triple-H's title, but he remained a man of great class and refused to lower himself to "The Game's" despicable tactics ... **Rey Misterio Jr.** energized Smackdown at every given opportunity and proved that a 5'3", 163-pound cruiserweight can be just as important as a 6'3", 295-pound behemoth ... **A.J. Styles** could be the best North American wrestler not in WWE ... **The Hurricane** may not pack too strong of a punch, but his presence on the Raw side shows kept things lighthearted when they needed to be. His interactions with The Rock were priceless ... Just another strong six months for **Eddie Guerrero** ... **Matt Hardy** may not be a true cruiserweight, but there's no doubt that he's a true talent ... **Christopher Daniels** tore it up in NWA-TNA, Japan, Ring of Honor, and everywhere else he wrestled ... **Christopher Nowinski** is an egomaniac, but considering that he's receiving his first-ever "A" from us, maybe he should be ... **Jazz** is far from the most likable WWE diva, but as her lengthy run with the women's championship proved, she's certainly one of the most effective.

THEY GET A "B"

Jeff Jarrett didn't wrestle all that much as NWA heavyweight champion, and we like our champions to be fightin' ... Let's hear it for **The Big Show**: He carried his position as one of Smackdown's top heels pretty darn well ... **Christian** was already having a pretty good half-year, and then he went and won the newly reintroduced Intercontinental title ... **Victoria** is an evil little diva, which might be why we like her so much ... **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** was in the middle of the best run of his career when he got hurt ... **A-Train** found himself choo-chooing near the top tier ... Joining TNA rejuvenated **Raven**, who was foundering in WWE ... **Charlie Haas** and **Shelton Benjamin** were pretty close to inseparable, which is why they share the same grade ... **Ric Flair** was performing like the "Nature Boy" of old when he was given the opportunity ... **Trish Stratus** didn't show us anything new, but she has her game so honed that that's not really all that shocking ... **Amazing Red** was simply that much of the time ... **Sean O'Haire** did pretty well as Roddy Piper's protege, but we'd like to see him on his own ... **Rene Dupree** and **Sylvan Grenier** made an immediate impact ... **Tajiri** simply fires on all cylinders ... **Scott Steiner** performed pretty well once he found his role ... So did **Shawn Michaels** ... **Glenn Gilberti** still looks and acts an awful lot like Disco Inferno ... **Danny** and **Doug Basham** feuded in Ohio Valley Wrestling before uniting on Smackdown ... **Steven Richards** played the vulnerable heel almost too well ... **Test** was a bit too reliant on Stacy Keibler's popularity and still needs to find some charisma ... **Torrie Wilson** didn't show much as a wrestler, but a *Playboy* cover has to count for something! ... **Elix Skipper** spent his time in TNA trying to prove that his run in WCW wasn't a fluke.

GRADES ARE IN...

THEY GET A "C"



Rob Van Dam should be so much more than a tag team champion ... **Chris Benoit** was simply underutilized ... **Rikishi** needs to watch out for that West Nile virus, because his career is so stagnant ... **Kane** didn't figure out what the heck he was doing until the very end of the grading period ... **Buh Buh Ray** and **D-Von Dudley** spent too much time fighting suspensions and firings to be the tag team force they usually are ... The six months turned in by **The Undertaker** would have earned almost anyone but UT a much stronger grade. We simply expect more out of "The Dead Man" ... **Bill Goldberg** joined the game late and then took time to build steam ... **Spanky** is popular and gutsy, but he's having a hard time fitting in ... **Kid Kash** should vent some of his fury in a man's direction ... **Goldust** never recovered from losing Booker T as a regular tag team partner ... **Nunzio**, **Chuck Palumbo**, and **Johnny Stamboli** didn't make us laugh all that much ... **Val Venis** simply wasn't made out to be Chief Morley ... **Batista** looked pretty good, when he wasn't injured, that is ... **Lance Storm** held Raw's tag belts for quite a while—and he still didn't stand out! ... **Randy Orton** showed potential, but because of injuries, that's all he really showed ... **Rodney Mack** was sorta entertaining. Sorta.

THEY GET A "D"

Mr. America had us watching, but he didn't wrestle all that often ... **Kevin Nash** tried—he really did—but "Big Daddy Cool" just doesn't have it as a main-eventer anymore ... **Rhyno** returned with a lot of momentum, and then it disappeared ... **Maven** should be taking notes from Christopher Nowinski—the guy he beat to win the first *Tough Enough*—to learn how to develop a character ... **Rico**, we hardly knew you those six months ... **Jerry Lynn** had a real tough time of it ... Coming off *Tough Enough III*, **Bill DeMott** got pushed. Then he got lost in the mix ... Speaking of *Tough Enough III*, **Tommy Dreamer's** biggest moment came when he laid a beatin' on the two champs ... We have a feeling that **Rosey's** three minutes are just about up now that **Jamal's** been released.

THEY GET AN "F"

Shannon Moore's hands are developing welts from patting Matt Hardy on the back so often ... We like **Spike Dudley**, but he simply didn't do enough to warrant a higher grade ... **Crash Holly** is looking (praying?) for the return of the hardcore title ... **Ron Killings** has gone from NWA champion to practically invisible ... **Funaki** needs to concentrate more on wrestling and less on comedy and announcing ... **Jamie Noble** is tearing apart his double-wide trailer in an attempt to find out where his push went. And **Nidia** is right there with him ... As unbelievable as it is, the best part of **Roddy Piper's** segments came when they ended.

THEY GET AN INCOMPLETE

Al Snow's *Tough Enough* for training, but apparently not for regular in-ring action ... **Ivory's** here-today, gone-tomorrow schedule is why she's receiving this non-grade ... The same goes for **Jacquelyn** ... And **Molly Holly** ... **Edge**, **Bradshaw**, **William Regal**, **Billy Kidman**, **Mark Henry**, **Nathan Jones**, and **Hardcore Holly** were battling injuries.

PAUL HEYMAN WILL MANAGE CHRIS BENOIT TO THE SMACKDOWN TITLE

The stars seem ready to align on this one. In the past half-year, Chris Benoit went from being *thisclose* to the Smackdown title to losing meaningless tag team matches with Rhyno. Benoit has clearly become frustrated with the situation, and the Benoit-Rhyno tandem should be history by the time you read these words. "The Rabid Wolverine" is at his breaking point.

And then there's Heyman. He blew it when he dumped Brock Lesnar for The Big Show, and he blames Lesnar for his managerial mistake. Heyman wants nothing more than to see Lesnar relieved of the title. Heyman has also been outspoken in his praise of Benoit ever since Benoit competed for him in ECW. Heyman knows Lesnar's weaknesses and could help the smaller Benoit overcome Lesnar's strength advantage by sharing his insights. Both men would benefit from such a union.

If Lesnar were to lose focus on Benoit for just an instant, Benoit could capitalize with a crossface. And Lesnar could *easily* lose focus with his arch-enemy taunting him from ringside.

Heyman and Benoit could capture gold together

GOLDBERG WILL TURN HEEL

Goldberg made a half-hearted heel turn back in 2000, and it never stuck, because the fans simply didn't want to boo him and he didn't want to be booed. At Backlash, Goldberg heard more than his share of boos during his match against The Rock. He heard even more against Chris Jericho at Bad Blood. Many of today's WWE fans weren't watching WCW during the Goldberg era. They don't care about the way he steamrolled the competition. As far as WWE fans are concerned, Goldberg is still unproven. Yes, he beat The Rock, but how would he fare against Steve Austin, Undertaker, Brock Lesnar, or Triple-H?

Goldberg carries himself as a superstar, but he hasn't established himself as a superstar in WWE yet. When the fans think the matchmakers are trying to shove someone down their throats, they rebel, just like they did against the rookie Rock. If they feel Goldberg is getting superstar treatment before earning it, they're going to continue to protest.

"Da Man" is going to turn ... whether he likes it or not.

STING WILL DEBUT ON *RAW*, BUT WILL BE UNABLE TO WIN THE RAW TITLE

When Scott Steiner arrived in WWE last fall, he signed with Raw. Same with Goldberg. And both Rock and Steve Austin found their way to Raw when they returned to the promotion.

Maybe it's just because *Raw* remains a live broadcast or because of the show's legacy in the Monday night wars, but *Raw* is still WWE's flagship program. Sting was rumored to be arriving in WWE this summer, and if he does, it seems natural that Raw will be his brand. As WCW's old franchise player, Sting could recapture the attention of some of the casual fans that stopped watching when WCW folded.

However, it's not easy for a wrestler closely associated with a rival promotion to win a major WWE title. Back in the mid-1980s, Harley Race was a seven-time NWA champion. In the WWF, he was a mid-carder. Same thing happened to Kerry Von Erich, Ron Simmons, Ron Garvin, and Vader—all former world champions who struggled in the WWF. Sting hasn't wrestled regularly in more than two years, but his TNA appearances indicate a renewed commitment to the sport and the increased exposure could spike ratings should he choose to sign with WWE. Still, he has to know that title shots hard to come by.

We're not saying we want to see this happen, but we certainly *could* see it happening.

PREDICTIONS

LEX LUGER WILL APPEAR ON WWE TV TO DISCUSS THE DEATH OF MISS ELIZABETH

Luger might be ready to break his silence

The death of Elizabeth Hulette had all the elements of a tabloid shocker. A beautiful woman known for her quiet grace and dignity dies while staying at the home of a hulking pro wrestler who only weeks earlier had been visited by the police and charged with a crime during a domestic dispute.

However, authorities quickly determined that foul play had not played a role in Hulette's death. Toxicology tests would determine the cause of death after this issue went to press.

It's a tragic situation all around. Luger was charged with unrelated drug charges, but his reputation has been sullied by his girlfriend's death. WWE ran a special report on Hulette's death on *Confidential,* and that report hardly cast Luger in a positive light. Because fans only knew Hulette as the angelic Miss Elizabeth, they find it hard to accept that she died so young (42). Many are anxious to hear Luger's take on the story.

We think he will be invited to do so, most likely in a sitdown session with Jim Ross.

MICK FOLEY WILL COME OUT OF RETIREMENT FOR A TITLE SHOT

On June 9, Mick Foley got physically involved in a wresting fracas for the first time in 19 months. As it turned out, the man who blasted him with a steel chair was Triple-H, the same man who retired him three years earlier. We know how badly Foley would like to get his revenge on Triple-H. And we know that Vince McMahon has been bringing back names form the past in an effort to spike ratings.

Foley is rested and promoting his new book, *Tietam Brown.* If McMahon (or Foley's long-time friend/Raw co-GM, Steve Austin) dangled a shot at the Raw title before him, Foley might jump at the chance to simultaneously reclaim his belt, avenge his loss to Triple-H, and promote his new book to the max. After all, Foley's mentor was Terry Funk, a man who never understood the meaning of the word "retirement." By the time the Survivor Series rolls around, expect to see Cactus Jack or Mankind back in action.

ULTIMO DRAGON WILL WIN THE WWE U.S. TITLE

U.S. champion Ultimo Dragon?

WWE has announced plans to bring back the old WCW U.S. title, making it the Smackdown equivalent of the Raw Intercontinental title. What better man to win that title than Ultimo Dragon?

Dragon is a legend both in Japan and in Mexico. He proved to be a major force in WCW, dominating the cruiserweight title scene until botched elbow surgery seemed to prematurely end his career.

But Dragon couldn't say sayonara to the sport without ever having competed in WWE. He may not be able to match power with Brock Lesnar or The Big Show, but he can certainly compete against most of the heavyweights in WWE. The U.S. title would be an ideal goal for Dragon. To win a heavyweight title in the world's biggest promotion—three years after his career was proclaimed over by medical experts—would be a remarkable feat. We can't wait to see it happen.

PAUL LONDON WILL WIN THE RING OF HONOR CHAMPIONSHIP

Okay, we're not exactly taking a big chance with this one. Paul London is one of Ring of Honor's brightest stars. Trained by Shawn Michaels, London is incredibly resilient and capable of stealing a win over almost anyone.

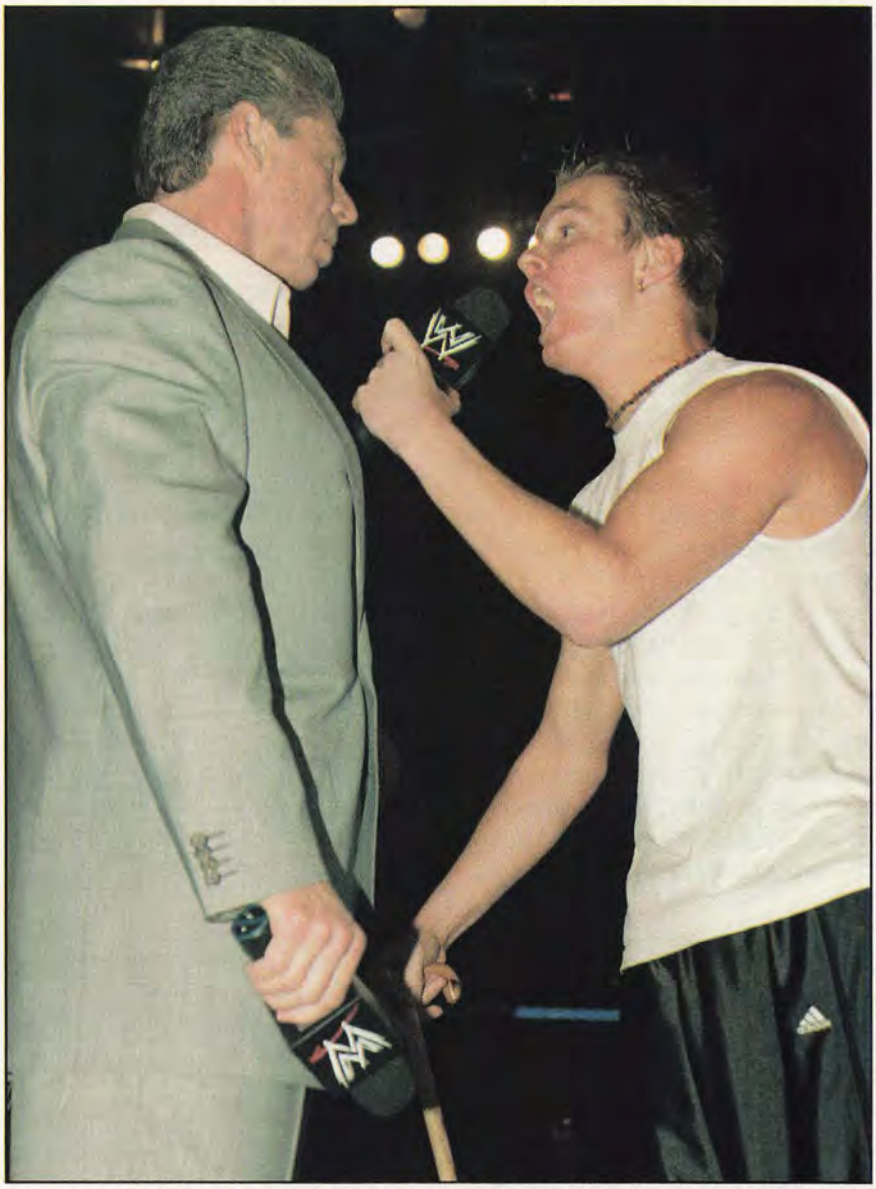
At press time, the ROH title was in the beefy hands of Samoa Joe, who, like London, is a fan favorite. However, Ring of Honor is based on the concept of no-frills, competitive wrestling, so it's hardly impossible for fellow fan favorites to square off.

It's possible that London could beat Samoa Joe, or for London to beat the man who beats Joe first. What we're saying is that London is such a talent that it's almost a sure bet that he will end 2003 with the ROH belt around his waist. We see a lengthy title reign in his future, and we think he has what it takes to help take Ring of Honor to the next level. With just a little more experience, London can take the Ring of Honor title on the road and defend it in other territories. □

the business page

By Harry Burkett

WWE launches "Armed Forces Families" campaign ... Now that Raw and Smackdown have separate champions and pay-per-views, it only made sense for WWE to launch brand-exclusive goodwill initiatives. In this case, Shawn Michaels will be spearheading a campaign by Raw superstars to raise funds for the families of military personnel killed in the Iraq War.



Zach Gowen discusses his future with Vince McMahon during an in-ring Smackdown segment at Madison Square Garden in June. Tenacious Z has the respect of everyone in the WWE locker room, particularly Hulk Hogan—and including Mr. McMahon.

"I thought this is the least we could do for all the military people who are risking their lives for us," Shawn Michaels said during a June 24 appearance on *Fox & Friends*. "Being a military brat myself, this is something that's really close to my heart."

Indeed, Michaels was born at Williams Air Force Base in Chandler, Arizona, and his father was a colonel in the U.S. Air Force. He presented the idea to WWE, which, in turn, formed a partnership with FYE-For Your Entertainment stores. The goal is to raise $100,000 through the sale of WrestleMania XX posters at FYE stores, and Raw superstars will make special appearances at various outlets during the next several months. Michaels, Steve Austin, Triple-H, Ric Flair, Kevin Nash, Bill Goldberg, and Trish Stratus were all on hand to kick off the campaign on June 23 at New York's Rockefeller Center.

"We are glad to be part of the effort to ensure the children of these military heroes lost in action in Iraq will be provided for," ssaid WWE CEO Linda McMahon. "I want to thank Shawn Michaels for bringing forward this idea and helping to organize the superstars to make it happen."

In a related note, WWE offered Bad Blood free of charge to returning military personnel.

Zach Gowen in *USA Today* ... Smackdown superstar Zach Gowen, who wrestled as Tenacious Z in NWA-TNA, received coverage in *USA Today* in a feature that discussed why his leg was amputated and how his sheer determination has led to an amazing career in the squared circle. The story, penned by former *WCW Magazine* editor Ross Forman, noted that Gowen's left leg was amputated about seven inches below his hip to prevent the spread of osteogenic sarcoma, a potentially fatal cancer.

Gowen was diagnosed with cancer in 1991 after he slipped while bowling, snapping his leg. Doctors

found a grapefruit-sized tumor that was cancerous. He endured chemotherapy, lost some hearing in his left ear, and had to deal with heart, liver, and kidney problems. "If I had two legs, I wouldn't have been hired," Gowen said of his current WWE stint. "The fact that I have one leg and can actually work, that's the reason I got hired."

While the modest Gowen plays down his abilities, those inside WWE see an opportunity to promote a very inspirational message. "This is an unbelievable human-interest story ... something that can help and motivate a lot of people all over the world," said Hulk Hogan. "That's how big I think the Zach Gowen story is."

Gowen added that watching wrestling, specifically "The Hulkster," helped him get through his illness.

NWA-TNA in NYC ... To help further establish NWA-TNA in the pay-per-view industry, the Nashville-based promotion opened an office in New York City on June 23. TNA's new chief operating officer, Frank Romano, will be based in Manhattan. TNA Executive Vice President Jeff Jarrett said he felt Romano, a former vice president of event programming and operations for In Demand, would be a great addition to the team.

"Frank has been a supporter of TNA since its debut in June of 2002, and we're thrilled to have him on board," said Jarrett. "TNA's first year has been extremely successful, and Frank's experience and enthusiasm for the product will accelerate the company's growing success."

TNA is available on In Demand, DirecTV, and TVN in the U.S., and runs on Viewer's Choice and Bell Expressvu in Canada.

Sasuke stays behind the mask ... In our June 2003 issue, we reported The Great Sasuke, who won a seat in the Iwate Prefectural Assembly, had run into difficulty with fellow legislators. They demanded that he unmask for assembly sessions, but the Michinoku Pro star proclaimed, "This is my face ... I won support from voters with this face, and to take it off would be breaking promises."

According to the *Japan Times*, members of the Liberal Democratic Party introduced a motion that would ban the wearing of masks during assembly sessions, and Sasuke—a member of the opposing Liberal Party—was the obvious target. The initial vote was a tie, but the assembly chairman used his deciding vote to reject the motion. The LDP issued a statement, describing the result as "very regrettable" and blaming Sasuke for throwing "the Assembly and the general public into confusion for roughly two months."

Sasuke, who received more votes than any other candidate in the April election, addressed the issue at a news conference. "To be honest, I'm relieved the rules were not amended," he said. Sasuke agreed to wear a chinless model for the sake of goodwill.

The Great Sasuke can't mask his joy after winning the right to keep his face covered while serving in Japan's assembly. Sasuke maintains that the people had elected a masked man and to remove his hood would be to break a promise.

WWE Stockwatch

(For the period of May 16 to June 15, 2003)

30-Day High: 10.30 on May 30
30-Day Low: 9.10 on June 10
52-Week High: 14.79 on June 17, 2002
52-Week Low: 6.76 on October 16, 2002

WWE posted another loss, a figure of $4.1-million, for the fourth fiscal quarter ending April 30. During the same quarter last year, WWE had posted a $16-million profit. The World was responsible for part of the loss because WWE incurred an after-tax charge of $8.9-million after it shut down the restaurant and entertainment complex. Overall, this quarter was better than the last one, which had posted a $16-million loss.

CEO Linda McMahon said the negative quarter was "compounded by a weak economy and the abundance of reality-based programming, which we believe has drawn away some of our audience." Total revenues for the quarter were $105.9-million, compared to $131.6-million the previous year.

According to WWE, the company's cash flow remains strong, which, along with tax law changes, led to its decision to initiate quarterly dividends for holders of Class A and Class B common shares. The board of directors approved a measure to give investors four cents a share based on stock value as of June 27. For the McMahon family, that would translate into nearly a $9-million annual dividend (which is sweetened with the new tax laws). WWE also bought back Viacom's share of its business, representing three percent of total common stock. The company had approximately $271-million in cash at the time of the transaction.

TV breakdown

Week beginning May 19

Raw (TNN): 3.6
Smackdown (UPN): 3.3
Velocity (TNN): 0.8
Confidential (TNN): 0.7
Sunday Night Heat (TNN): 0.8

Analysis: WWE executives had to be depressed when discovering that Bill Goldberg's arrival probably wouldn't make a long-term ratings impact on *Raw*. Although Goldberg's first televised WWE match helped *Raw* score 4.4 on May 12, his win over Lance Storm enabled the program to earn only an overall number of 3.6 this week. Raw champion Triple-H's title defense against Ric Flair was sensational, however. On *Smackdown*, Sean O'Haire vs. Mr. America was one of its more cartoonish main events in recent memory.

Week beginning May 26

Raw (TNN): 3.7
Smackdown (UPN): 3.4
Velocity (TNN): 0.8
Confidential (TNN): 0.8
Sunday Night Heat (TNN): 1.1

Analysis: Ric Flair proved why he's "the dirtiest player in the game" when he turned against Shawn Michaels during the handicap main event against Raw champion Triple-H, although HBK had hailed the "Nature Boy" as his childhood idol earlier on the show. Smackdown champion Brock Lesnar and The Undertaker appeared in that program's main event, facing shaky opposition in Chuck Palumbo, Johnny Stamboli, and The Big Show. *Smackdown* suffered from too much Mr. America and Vinnie Mac this week.

Week beginning June 2

Raw (TNN): 3.9
Smackdown (UPN): 3.1
Velocity (TNN): 0.7
Confidential (TNN): 0.7
Sunday Night Heat (TNN): 0.8

Analysis: Because *Raw* emanated from San Diego, The Rock was able to make the short trip from Hollywood to appear on "The Highlight Reel," making it a star-studded show. Chris Jericho and Christian attacked the "People's Champion." Kurt Angle made his much-anticipated return to *Smackdown* and thanked the fans for supporting him while he recovered from spinal surgery. But Angle's appearance didn't prevent *Smackdown* from losing more ground to *Raw*.

Week beginning June 9

Raw (TNN): 3.5
Smackdown (UPN): 3.7
Velocity (TNN): 0.7
Confidential (TNN): 0.8
Sunday Night Heat (TNN): 0.9

Analysis: Co-General Manager Steve Austin introduced Mick Foley as the special referee for Raw champion Triple-H's "Hell In A Cell" match against Kevin Nash at Bad Blood. The creative team still didn't attempt to make Bill Goldberg the centerpiece of the program. Smackdown champion Brock Lesnar and The Big Show provided footage for the year-end highlight reel when Lesnar suplexed Big Show from the middle rope, causing the ring to collapse. *Smackdown* overtook *Raw* in the ratings.

Week beginning June 16

Raw (TNN): 4.1
Smackdown (UPN): 3.2
Velocity (TNN): 1.0
Confidential (TNN): 1.0
Sunday Night Heat (TNN): 1.0

Analysis: Maybe WWE is benefiting from weak competition in the summer TV season, or maybe viewers are in the mood for wrestling again. Whatever the reason, *Raw* blew out *Smackdown* by cracking the 4.0 mark, and the Saturday night programs–*Velocity* and *Confidential*–tied *Sunday Night Heat* with improved ratings of 1.0. Both primary shows ended with disqualifications, as Raw tag champs La Resistance beat Rob Van Dam and Kane, and Smackdown champ Brock Lesnar defeated The Big Show.

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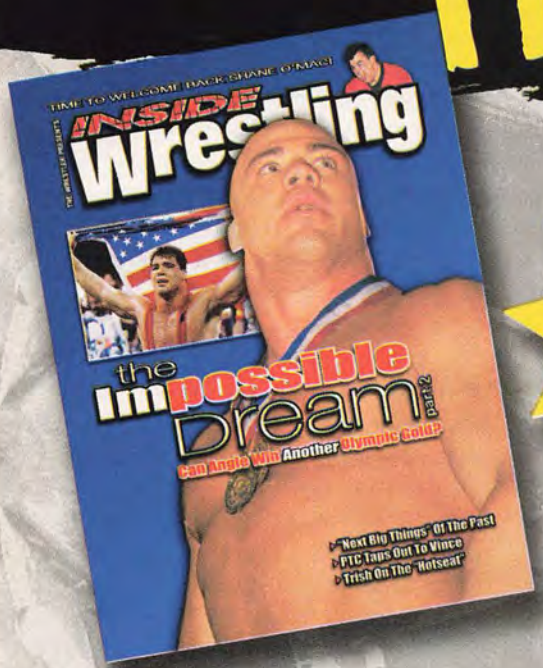
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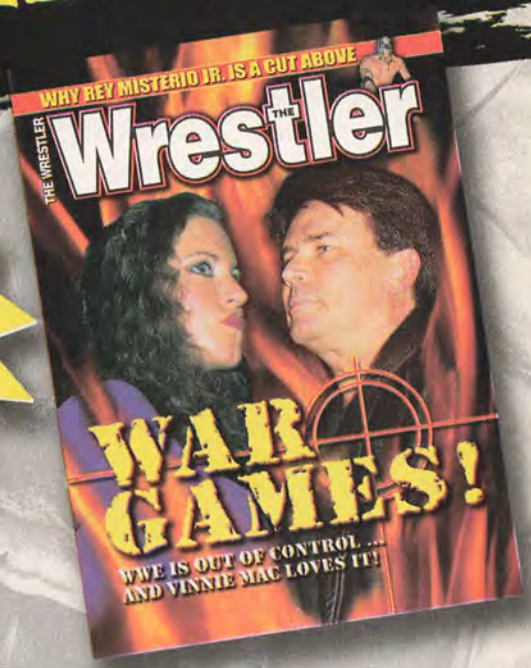

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A0803R

the steel cage

By Liz Hunter

A HERO'S WELCOME. Kurt Angle was so happy to be back in a WWE ring that he actually encouraged "You suck" chants at the June 3 taping of *Smackdown.* Angle's ability to make fun of himself, his willingness to stand up to The Big Show, and his new friendship with Smackdown champ Brock Lesnar have combined to make him the brand's most popular star. Of course, all of this is in addition to Angle's remarkable comeback, only three months after some spinal surgeons advised him to retire.

If you remember, I criticized Angle's decision to defend the Smackdown title against Lesnar at WrestleMania XIX. I just couldn't see why Angle would want to risk paralysis or death, especially with a four-month-old daughter at home. Then Dr. Hae-Dong Jho of Pittsburgh informed Angle of a new surgical strategy whereby he would reconstruct his two damaged vertebrae, instead of the previously advised technique of fusing them together, which would have required one year of rehab, if not retirement from active competition. It might be the most inspirational comeback in wrestling history.

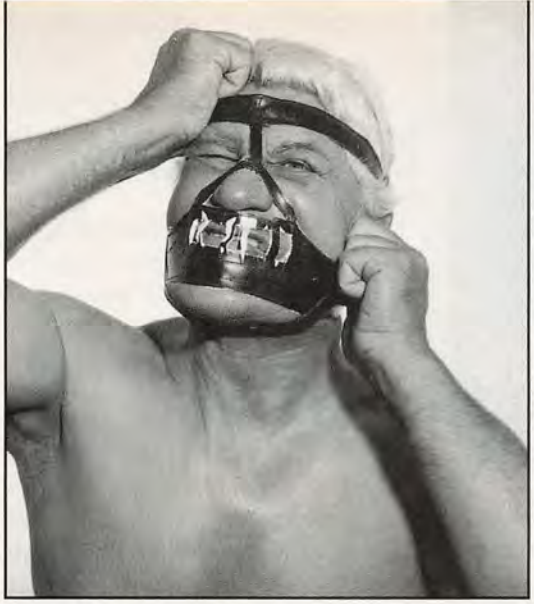
I predict Lesnar will become jealous of all the attention Angle is receiving, sparking a feud that will pit the Olympian against the Smackdown champ and former proteges Shelton Benjamin and Charlie Haas. Such an intense rivalry could launch the Olympian to the same level as The Rock and Steve Austin in terms of star power. And only an interbrand match between Angle and Bill Goldberg could top that.

Now I've heard that Steve Austin will be consulting Dr. Jho regarding surgery. If Dr. Jho can pull off another minor miracle and at least allow Austin one or two farewell matches, I will officially nominate the good doctor for next year's Stanley Weston Award!

BRET HAS NO REGRETS. I have just returned from a wonderful vacation in New Zealand, where I attended World Wrestling All-Stars' latest pay-per-view, The Reckoning. At the show, NWA heavyweight champion Jeff Jarrett won a unification bout with WWA heavyweight champion Sting, and Chris Sabin unified his TNA X title with Jerry Lynn's WWA international cruiserweight belt in a four-way match also involving Frankie Kazarian and Johnny Swinger. But for me, and most of the fans at Auckland's North Shore Events Centre, Bret Hart's address to the crowd was the most dramatic moment of the night.

After soaking in a standing ovation that lasted at least a minute, the "Hitman"—still recovering from a stroke he suffered last year—entered the ring and sat on a stool to share his thoughts. "Yesterday was the four-year anniversary of the death of my brother Owen," he said. "And I know my brother Owen would be very proud to see me sitting here right now talking to you people. It's been a tough year in wrestling. Lost some good friends. Lost the 'British Bulldog' this past year. Also lost 'Mr. Perfect'

With Kurt Angle embracing the fans (and Brock Lesnar) when he returned to competition in June, Liz Hunter expects to see his rivalry with "The Next Big Thing" to get a lot more interesting. She also expects to see Angle develop into an even bigger star than he already is.



The stories you might have heard about the late Fred Blassie wearing a muzzle during a match are, in fact, true. Long before wrestling became sports entertainment, Blassie understood the concept of showmanship.

Curt Hennig. And we recently lost Miss Elizabeth.

"I just want to say that they're all really decent people, and we're going to miss them. I like to think of myself, sitting here today, that I'm a survivor. I've survived a hell of a lot. Life is short and death is long. When I was in the hospital and when I had my stroke, I got e-mails from all over the world. I got them from fans here in New Zealand. I got them from people in places like Iraq and Russia and the Philippines ... the 'Hitman' was not just some wrestling character created in a boardroom by marketers or writers. I'm happy to tell you that I'm a real person."

Hart received another standing ovation ... and deservedly so.

BEWARE BLASSIE'S BITE! If Hart had given his speech only a week later, he would have been able to pay tribute to Freddie Blassie, who died on June 2 at the age of 85. WWE remembrances have tended to focus on *"Classy"* Freddie Blassie. For a generation of West Coast fans, however, he was better known as "The Vampire." Blassie's penchant for gnawing his opponents was documented in "Why Blassie Went To The Dogs," published in the February 1969 issue of *The Wrestler.*

Blassie had mauled both Bobo Brazil and Americas champion Mil Mascaras with his teeth, and before Mascaras would grant him a rematch for the title, "The Man Of A Thousand Masks" demanded that Blassie wear a muzzle. When Blassie agreed to wear a muzzle in exchange for another title shot, Mascaras defeated him easily. According to the 1969 story, Blassie's friends were surprised he had accepted such a stipulation.

"But why," one of them asked him, "did you consent to wear the muzzle in the first place? You know Mascaras was just bluffing about pulling out of the bout."

Fred regarded the man as he would a simpleton. "I know that," he rasped. "But the fans didn't know it."

"Then why did you do it?" his friend persisted.

"Showmanship, pal," Fred Blassie said. "Pure showmanship."

It's surprising that the "s" word would have been uttered way back in 1969. Nevertheless, Blassie had it right: He was one of the greatest showmen ever. □

strange list of the month

FIVE MEN FREDDIE BLASSIE WILL TARGET IN THE AFTERLIFE

1. Rikidozan
2. Ray Stevens
3. The Sheik
4. Ray Gunkel
5. Andy Kaufman

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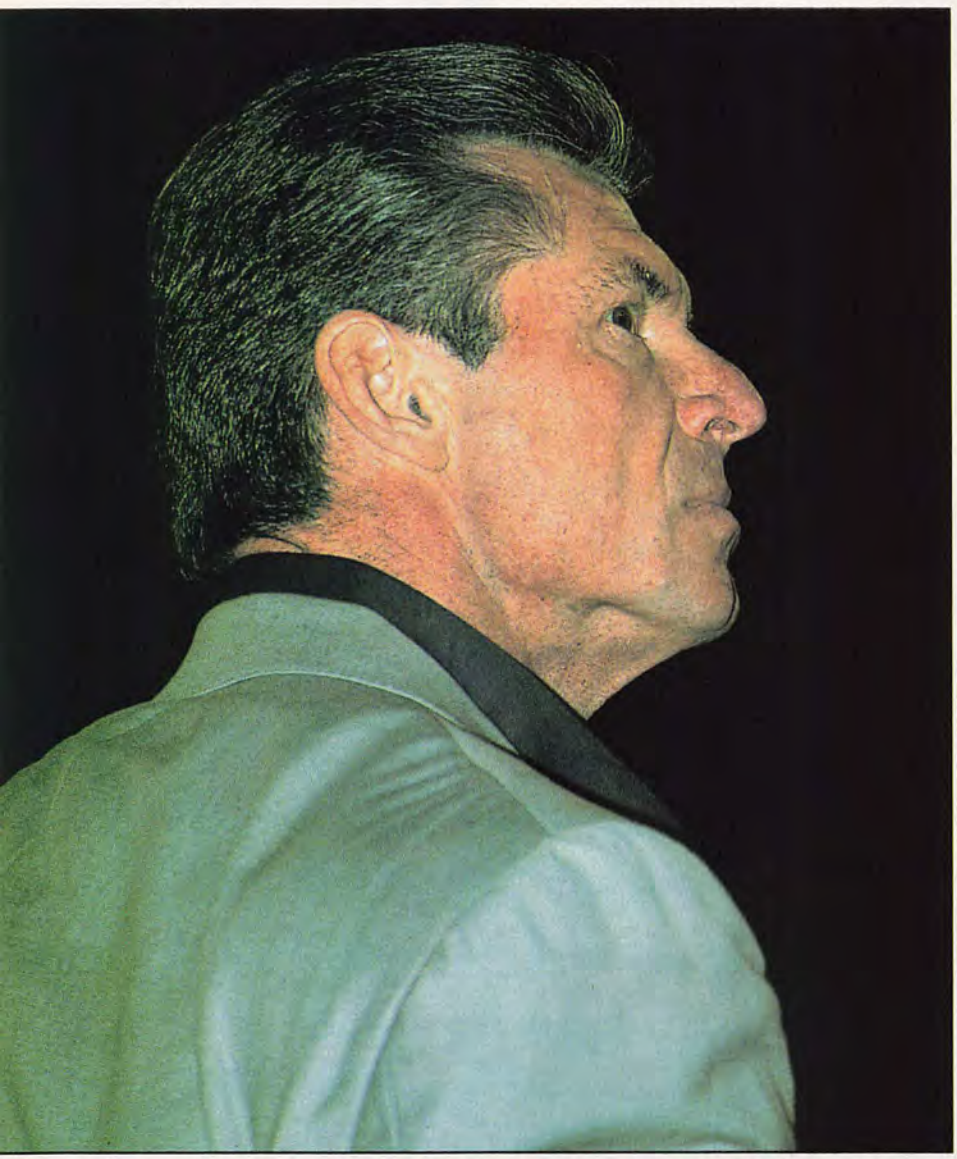
win, lose, or draw

By Harry Burkett

OVER THE PAST year, many of the letters and e-mails submitted to our reader forum, "Between Falls," have addressed one of three topics: Steve Austin's walkout and eventual comeback, how the powers-that-be are holding down Rob Van Dam, and the WWE brand extension. Interestingly, we have received more mail regarding the brand extension than any other topic during the past year. Check our recent back issues, and you'll see that I'm right.



So many *PWI* readers are quick to point out the shortcomings of the brand extension, without giving Vince McMahon credit for having a better view of the big picture. Harry Burkett urges patience.

Why the fascination with the brand extension? I have a few theories. Three years ago, we constantly analyzed the respective strengths and weaknesses of WWE and WCW. Comparisons between Raw and Smackdown have replaced that debate, but, since both brands are owned by WWE, fans aren't able to get as excited about that simulated rivalry as they did the Monday night war. Smart fans, especially, believe they're above discussing mere storylines or even comparing the merits of one wrestler to another. And, since discussions of WWE's stock price and its last fiscal quarter are too dry even for these fans, the brand extension becomes a logical topic. As a result, readers flood "Between Falls" with their thoughts on why the brand extension is succeeding or failing. Nine times out of 10, readers deem the brand extension a failure. In this very issue, reader Rey Sifuentes Jr. compares WWE to a fried chicken place in his hometown of Eagle Pass, Texas, that was supposedly planning to split single drumsticks in two and sell them as separate pieces. He represents a common view that the brand extension dilutes the whole product, and that neither the Raw nor Smackdown title can ever have the prestige of an undisputed championship.

Last issue, we ran an e-mail from Tony Ducey of Garnish, Newfoundland, who said the brand extension was fine in theory, but another draft should be held to redistribute talent between the two rosters yet again. He stated that Brock Lesnar should be switched to Raw, while Rob Van Dam and Chris Jericho should go to Smackdown. If you ask me, a re-draft would be a disaster because the brand extension would no longer be credible. Occasional trades between the two rosters are okay, just as long as they're part of long-term plans, rather than mere hotshots.

In the issue before that, reader Robert Schuschu advised WWE to

"pull the plug" on the brand extension because Raw's goofy storylines were no match for the sheer athleticism in the Smackdown brand, in both the heavyweight and cruiserweight divisions. Schuschu wrote, "The fact that *Smackdown* blows *Raw* out of the water every week proves that having separate rosters just isn't working."

I disagree. The brand extension is working for that very reason—not because "*Smackdown* blows *Raw* out of the water," but because fans are beginning to develop strong opinions about the two brands. Lately, we've been receiving mail stating that *Raw*, while not necessarily superior in terms of matches, has been offering more surprises and more compelling storylines than *Smackdown*.

Raw's Lance Storm and Maven will be presented with an opportunity to be central storyline figures now that WWE is promoting brand-exclusive pay-per-views. Burkett is excited about the possibility of the company finding new stars in its midst.

This kind of debate is exactly what the McMahons had in mind when they launched the brand extension back on April 1, 2002. They wanted to give fans something to argue about again. Is Smackdown champion Brock Lesnar better than Raw champion Triple-H? Should Randy Orton be traded to Smackdown? Should the women's title be exclusive property of Raw? In fact, the McMahons would rather have fans critiquing the pluses and minuses of the brand extension itself than getting bored with a one-company industry and looking for an alternative.

Raw and Smackdown are finally beginning to gel as separate brands. The first Raw-only pay-per-view, Bad Blood, is now a part of history. Some fans cited the mixed reviews of that PPV as proof the brand extension needed retooling. I'm going to make a bold prediction that the first Smackdown-only pay-per-view, Vengeance, which will have occurred by the time this issue goes to press, will receive more positive reviews. If my prediction holds true, it will indicate that Raw—and not the entire brand extension—needs some tweaks here and there.

While SummerSlam, Survivor Series, the Royal Rumble, and WrestleMania will remain joint productions of Raw and Smackdown, I think the brand-exclusive PPVs will expose the considerable depth of both rosters, and will help elevate more talent. Even with Bad Blood, I didn't perceive that anyone missed the Smackdown superstars—just that Raw's best athletes took backseats to bad skits and other wrestlers past their prime. Besides, it gave Smackdown two months to build toward Vengeance, and that should lead to greater anticipation of the event. In the long run, that should increase buy rates more than having combined rosters every month.

I admit the brand extension is progressing slowly, but I'd like to believe Vince McMahon is enough of a genius to be doing this by design. Admittedly, that could be wishful thinking on my part. Now that separate rosters, two world champions, and brand-exclusive PPVs have been established, there are other possibilities for Raw and Smackdown. McMahon may try to encourage fan loyalty to specific brands by differentiating the two products. Raw could take a wilder, more hardcore approach, while Smackdown retains a smoother, more sportsmanlike atmosphere. Or McMahon may decide that he doesn't want fans to choose between Raw and Smackdown, instead preferring them to sample both. That would explain why we haven't seen much of a promotional rivalry between the two so far.

Another possibility is that the brand extension isn't necessarily supposed to be permanent. McMahon could be playing a clever waiting game, grooming superstars for both brands and firmly entrenching two world champions—all with the idea of having a huge clash between Raw and Smackdown when the economy improves and wrestling becomes hot again. There will be a whole new set of potential dream matches if WWE maintains a wall between the two brands. Within a couple of years, McMahon could have his own Monday night war on his hands, which he will use to rake in the cash from both sides.

So I have plenty of faith in the brand extension. I encourage Rey Sifuentes Jr., Tony Ducey, Robert Schuschu, and all of our other readers suffering from brand extension apprehension to be optimistic about this crazy experiment. The next time I peek into the "Between Falls" mailbag, I'll know whether you're willing to give it a chance. □

the straight shooter

By Dan Murphy

ELEVEN MONTHS AGO, I unveiled a truly revolutionary concept that could have had ramifications throughout the wrestling industry.

And I was called a pervert.

During a staff meeting, I suggested we build on our annual *"PWI* 500" listings and create the *"PWI* 100," which would rank the top 100 women in the business. As in the "500," women would be ranked according to their win-loss records, technical ability, impact on the sport, quality of opposition, and activity. In other words, it would not be just a beauty pageant—wrestling ability would be more important than T & A.

When Brandi Mankiewicz demanded to know who would sit through the hours of videotapes, sort through stacks of publicity photos, and, if necessary, conduct *(*ahem*)* personal interviews with the ladies, I offered my own services. I'm a team player, you must understand.

Brandi suggested I spend a little more time covering the Gorgeous Ladies of Outrageous Wrestling (or something close to that) and stop *wasting* time at staff meetings, and I colorfully said I'd take the redhead's suggestion under consideration. Stu Saks intervened before conversation took a particularly nasty turn and suggested I go ahead with a condensed version of my vision in my "Straight Shooter" column.

Consider the beautiful blonde Nikita (of OVW for now) to be number eight with a bullet in this year's, um, "*PWI* 10." Dan Murphy wouldn't be surprised to see her ascend to the top of WWE with Victoria-like speed.

The inaugural *"PWI* 10" was as follows: 10. Sara Undertaker. 9. Nidia. 8. Victoria. 7. Joanie Laurer. 6. Jacquelyn. 5. Ivory. 4. Lita. 3. Trish Stratus. 2. Jazz. 1. Molly Holly.

Any ladies who want to send in materials for consideration in next year's rankings, go ahead and drop me a line at (Sorry, Dan. We seem to have lost your e-mail address. *Oops!* Love, Brandi.) Unlike the "500," this only includes women that use the U.S. style, as opposed to Japanese *puroresu.* Here we go:

10. Torrie Wilson

You're probably thinking I'm a hypocrite right about now. I just finished writing that this wasn't all about T & A. Torrie is a lousy wrestler, technically speaking. Then again, so is Hulk Hogan, and he's managed to win a title or two in his day. Torrie has dominated feuds with Dawn Marie and Nidia, and is on the brink of a feud with Sable, once the WWF's top woman wrestler (she did hold the title). As far as impact on the sport goes, Torrie has been a *Playboy* cover girl and is the most heavily promoted diva on the WWE roster. And remember, a couple of years ago, everyone thought Trish Stratus was just eye candy. Maybe Torrie will surprise us, too.

9. Jacquelyn

She's still one of the toughest women in the business, but Jackie just isn't much of a factor in the WWE women's division. It's like the matchmakers keep forgetting she's on the roster, then throw her in a three- or four-way match on a pay-per-view every four or five months. Great talent, and very capable of becoming a force in the women's division again.

8. Nikita

La femme Nikita has been making waves in Ohio Valley Wrestling and has had several matches against fellow WWE developmental

Since she has done a lot of stunt work in Hollywood already, it's no surprise that Trinity employs a high-risk style in the ring. She's beautiful, too. NWA-TNA could make her a huge star ... if WWE doesn't do it first.

talent Linda Miles. Nikita has trained under Les Thatcher in the Heartland Wrestling Association and Jim Cornette and Danny Davis in OVW, and is all but guaranteed to become a player in WWE in the future. She's still very raw, but she is improving at a rapid pace. She could be the Victoria of 2004.

7. Trinity

NWA-TNA hasn't done much for women's wrestling (unless you count breasts being exposed for all to see and lollipop-sucking demonstrations), but Trinity is really starting to make a name for herself. Part of that is due to the emergence of her man, Kid Kash, as a major league heel in the X division. When Trinity and Kash's squabbling erupted into a match, Trinity impressed experts with both her brutal bump-taking and surprising offense. She's done stunt work for some of Hollywood's top female stars and could be a real star if TNA (or maybe WWE) gives her the chance.

6. Molly Holly

Last year, the virginal Holly maintained a stranglehold on the women's title. Since dropping the belt, however, she has all but disappeared. Molly still has plenty of talent and could easily be inserted back into the title picture. With her brutal snap suplexes and her graceful flying bodypress off the top rope, Molly is championship-caliber.

5. Sable

Sable once was the WWF's most dominant woman wrestler since Wendi Richter. She rebuilt the women's division and defended the title against Luna Vachon, Jacquelyn, and Tori. Since returning, she has done virtually no wrestling. Does she still have what it takes to be the top diva in WWE? I think she does. We'll find out soon enough.

4. Joanie Laurer

Joanie made headlines with her feud against Masa Chono in Japan. Even though she lost to and was spanked by Chono in front of 38,000 fans, she managed to win the respect of the discerning Japanese media. Joanie also decisively beat Akemi Nakamura in a boxing match and competed in several six-man (er, six-*people)* tag matches. With Vince McMahon on a nostalgia kick, expect a WWE return soon.

3. Victoria

Victoria went from being a talented OVW prospect to one of the most compelling characters in WWE in a matter of weeks. Who knew the sweet young lady could play a conniving psychopath so convincingly? All those hours of studying videotapes in OVW paid off. Her widow's peak finisher is one of the most effective and impressive moves in WWE.

2. Jazz

I can hear Theodore Long complaining already. I'm not a racist, Teddy. Jazz seemed to lose just a little during her recovery from knee surgery. Before injuring her knee, Jazz had little trouble handling Trish (and everyone else for that matter). But after "the bitch" came back, Jazz has had her hands full with Trish and Victoria. She never would have regained the title without Long's interference. But if she stays healthy, Jazz is the early front-runner for the number-one spot in next year's *"PWI* 10."

1. Trish Stratus

I truly wanted to rank Victoria number one this year, but Trish has made me a believer. Trish walked into WrestleMania XIX against the two strongest women wrestlers in WWE and walked out the winner. Title or no title, she is the new standard by which all others will be judged. □

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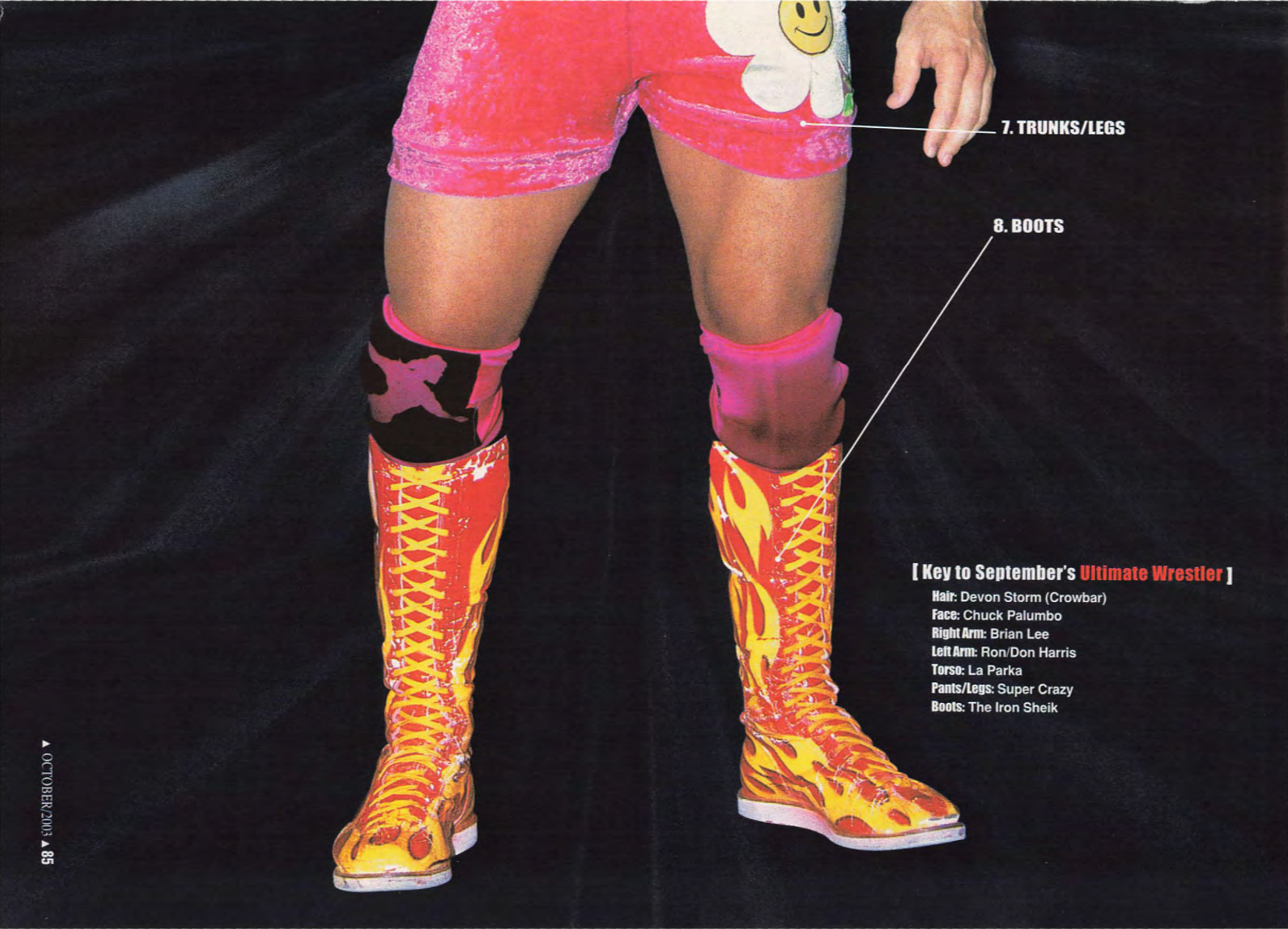
PRO Wrestling ILLUSTRATED
the ultimate wrestler
Can you name the 8 wrestlers that make up the ultimate wrestler?
Answers will appear in the December issue of PWI.
1. HAIR/FACE
2. MASK
3. NECKLACE
4. RIGHT ARM
5. LEFT ARM
6. TORSO



[Key to September's Ultimate Wrestler]

Hair: Devon Storm (Crowbar)
Face: Chuck Palumbo
Right Arm: Brian Lee
Left Arm: Ron/Don Harris
Torso: La Parka
Pants/Legs: Super Crazy
Boots: The Iron Sheik

fantastic finishers

Masa Chono has used the STF to win a lot of gold in Japan, but he also had his favorite hold used against him in one key match.

STF

You might also hear it being called: Stepover toehold with facelock, stepover toehold crossface

Where you might have seen it: The STF is one of many holds made famous by the late, great Lou Thesz, a six-time NWA World champion still considered by many to be the greatest wrestler that ever lived. Thesz was famous for his ability to "hook," meaning that he was adept at breaking an opponent down to the mat and isolating a joint or body part to force a quick submission. Many men were taken down to the mat by Thesz, and many never made it back to their feet until after the closing bell. Among Thesz' most feared holds was the STF, which he used to dispatch many foes. Thesz shared his STF technique with the likes of Masa Chono and Erik Watts, both of whom have used the STF as a finisher over the years. Chono's name, in particular, is synonymous with the STF in Japan, where the hold helped him win the IWGP heavyweight championship, as well as six IWGP tag titles. In the United States, reigning WWE women's champion Jazz has made the STF her primary finishing hold. The hold is also popular among independent wrestlers. In the States, wrestlers like Homicide, Blind Rage, Chad Collyer, and Mason Hunter make use of it regularly.

The scoop: The STF is a time-honored hold that is revered for its simplicity and effectiveness. Because it is so difficult to counter, many wrestlers choose to escape with a rope break, making it one of the few holds without a well-known reversal. In his long feud with Masa Chono, Hiroshi Hase felt the effects of the STF on numerous occasions—so often, in fact, that he developed a version of his own. Hase would tie up his opponent with control points at the leg and at the head, just like a traditional STF. However, Hase's variation would roll an opponent onto his side, making it impossible to crawl on the canvas and reach the ropes. The hold was so immobilizing that it earned Hase his first submission win over Chono at the end of their feud. Another popular variation is the one used by Toryumon star Milano Collection AT. His version dispenses with the facelock of the traditional STF in favor of a full-nelson. It is also exceptionally difficult to escape from this version.

How it's done: With his opponent laying facedown on the mat, a wrestler will bend the opponent's leg at the knee, and scissor around it with both of his own legs, facing the opponent's head. Since both legs are used to make the scissors, the wrestler applying the STF will often be on his side next to the opponent. Using both hands, the wrestler will reach around the opponent's head and secure a facelock, often across the bridge of the nose. Pulling the hold tighter brings the trapped leg closer to the head, and the more both the neck and knee bend, the more painful the STF becomes. □

Like Chono, former WCW and current NWA-TNA star Erik Watts learned his version of the STF from the master himself, Lou Thesz.

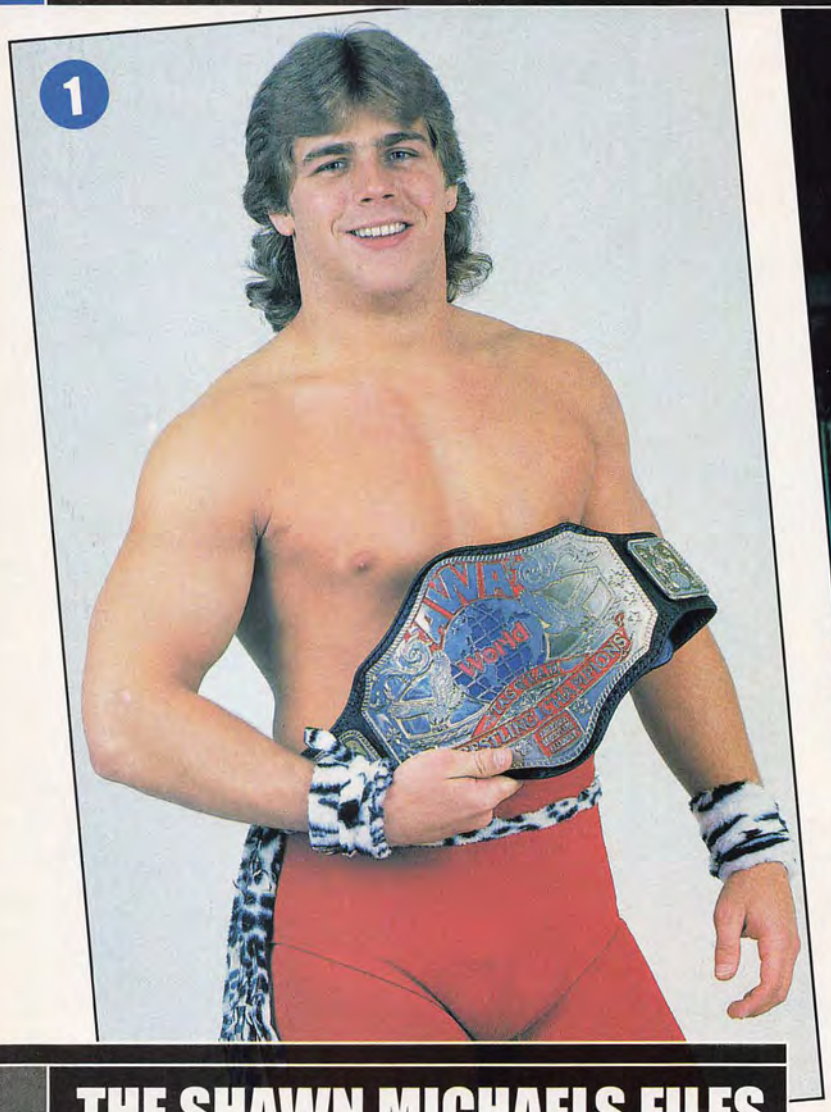
check it out!

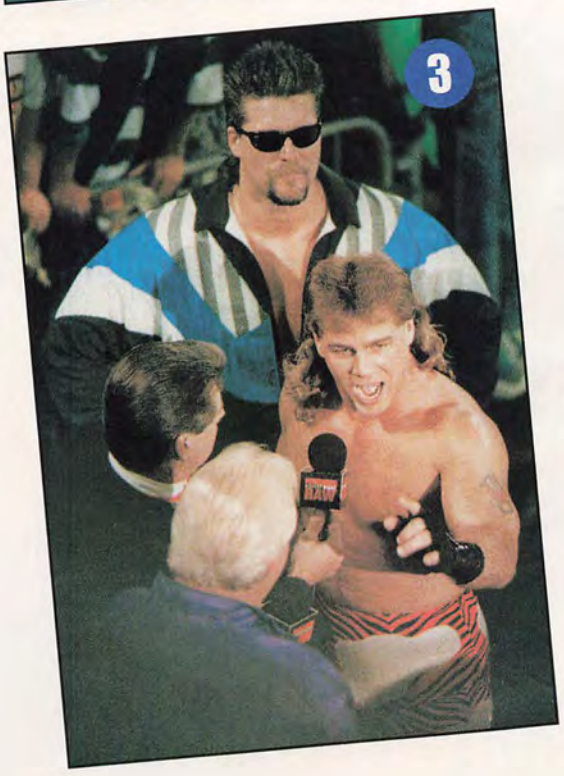
Although she is applying a rather sloppy version of the hold here, WWE women's champion Jazz has perfected the STF and used it to win important championship bouts.

Photo by Gary Dineen/Winning Image

It's amazing how drastically certain superstars change their looks over the years. A change in hair color or hairstyle here, a new ring outfit there, a few more tattoos here and there, or the mother of all changes ... the total gimmick overhaul. Every month, *PWI* will show you just how much one of your favorites has transformed himself. Yeah, it really is the same person in all these photos!

through the years





THE SHAWN MICHAELS FILES

1—Young-looking AWA tag champ (1987)
2—Getting a hug from Sherri Martel (1992)
3—Introducing Diesel to the WWF (1993)
4—He really loved the I-C belt (1993)
5—Looking a bit worn-down (1995)
6—The original DeGeneration X (1997)
7—Commissioner Michaels?! (2000)
8—Unbelievable WWE comeback! (2002)

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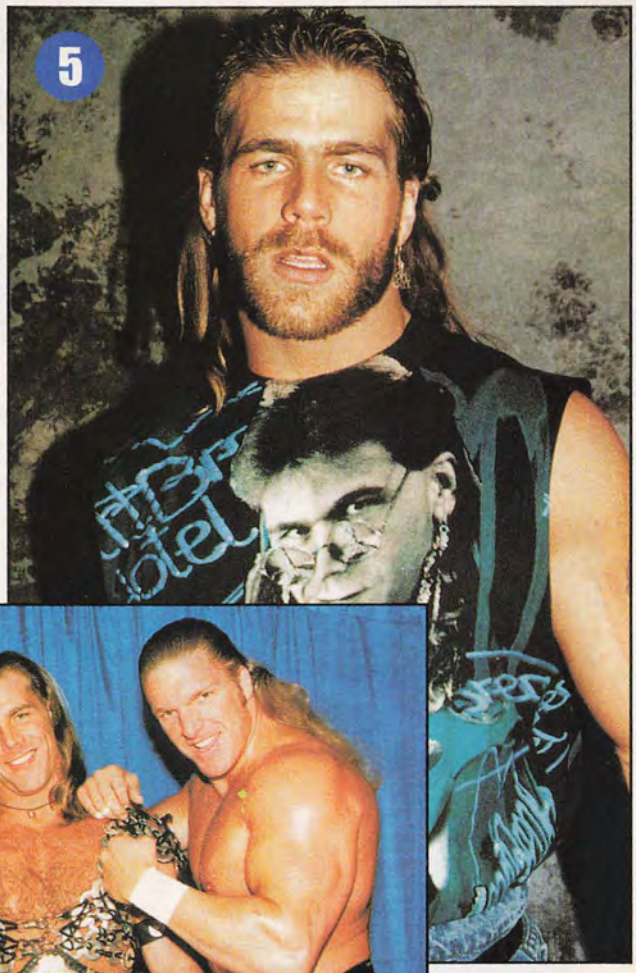
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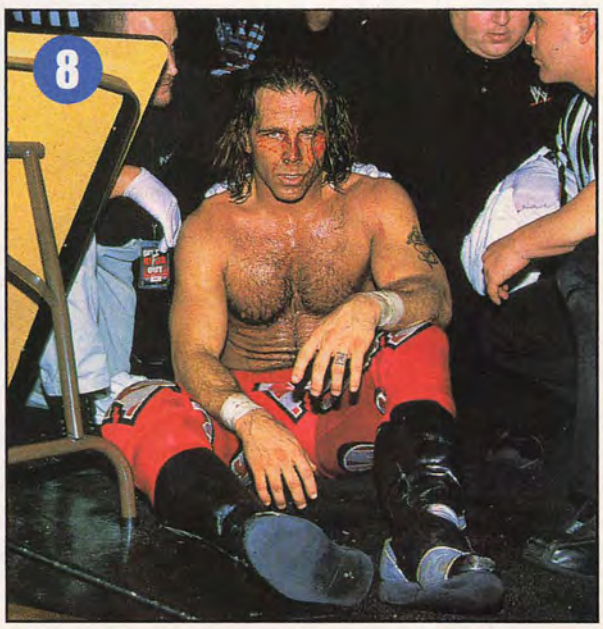
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the wrestling observer

hall of fame

In each issue, *PWI* will honor one member of the *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame, which we recognize as the sport's official Hall of Fame

FRED BLASSIE

TO SOME, FRED BLASSIE will forever be remembered as "The Vampire," the platinum-haired monster that used a nail file to turn his teeth into razor-sharp fangs that he could use as weapons. To others, he was "The Hollywood Fashion Plate," the cane-waving manager exhorting on some of the most exotic heels ever to enter the WWF. And yet others will remember Blassie as the man idolized by comedian Andy Kaufman and a man whose classic putdowns made him one of the most entertaining promo men in wrestling.

Fred Blassie was all these things and more. A wrestling pioneer, he remained relevant and active until just weeks before his death on June 2, 2003. He was 85.

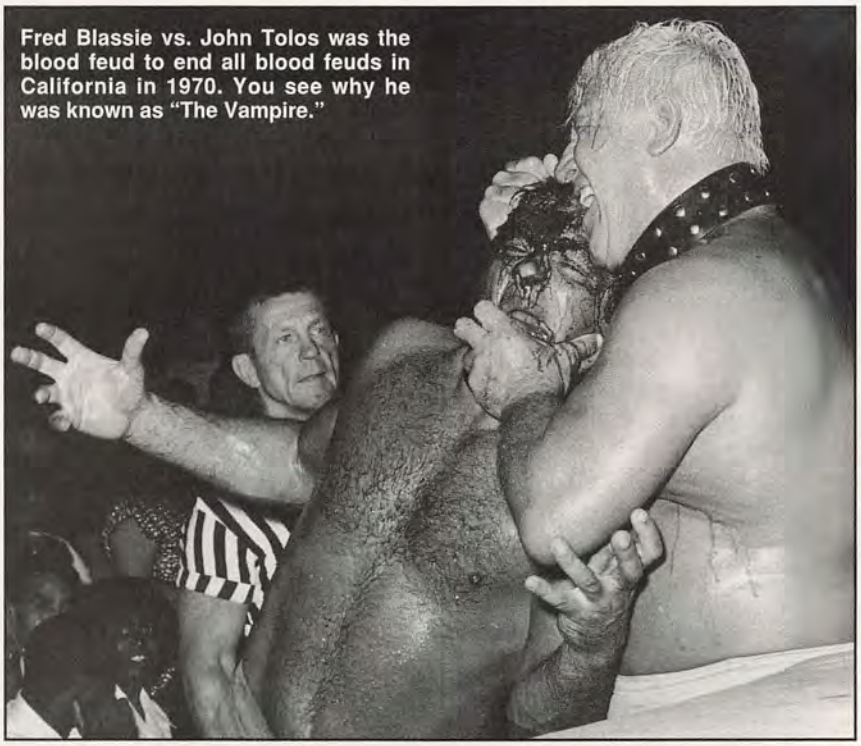
Blassie fell in love with wrestling at an early age. By the time he was a teenager, he had informed his mother he was going to be a big-time wrestler. He started on the carnival circuit, where he coined his classic insult "pencil-necked geek." Blassie later explained the term originally was used to describe a freak show attraction, a man "with a stack of dimes for a neck" who bit the heads off live chickens.

Blassie moved on from the carnival circuit and began wrestling for the NWA, competing primarily in the Southeast. In 1954, he won the NWA Southern title, a championship he would go on to win 14 times between 1954 and 1960. He tore into fan favorites, leaving a trail of bloody and bruised bodies in his wake. Fans across the United States learned about "The Vampire" from the lurid photos of him, his wild eyes glaring out from the scarlet gore of torn flesh, that appeared on the covers of wrestling magazines.

When opponents claimed that Blassie's teeth were dangerous weapons, he agreed to wrestle with a muzzle just so the match could be made. He took pride in the fact that he received death threats from irate fans and had even been attacked by furious fans on more than one occasion. That meant he was doing his job well.

Even though he was a hated wrestler for the majority of his career, Blassie's star power was undeniable. He made a cameo appearance on *The Dick Van Dyke Show* in 1962 and was often seen in the company of Hollywood-types.

Blassie entered the Los Angeles-based WWA in 1960 and went about securing his legacy in that area through that decade and into the 1970s. He won the WWA title



Fred Blassie vs. John Tolos was the blood feud to end all blood feuds in California in 1970. You see why he was known as "The Vampire."

Pedro Morales was one of two WWWF World champions whom Fred Blassie challenged. He used his choppers on Pedro, too.

Blassie (with Lou Thesz) and Dan Severn was honored for all his achievements in wrestling by the Cauliflower Alley Club in 1998.

four times, defeating Rikidozan, The Destroyer, and Edouard Carpentier. Blassie reigned as Americas champion three times during a period when the Southern California wrestling scene was as hot as any in the country.

Blassie wrestled for the World Wide Wrestling Federation title during Bruno Sammartino's first reign—and later against WWWF champion Pedro Morales. Though chronic knee injuries forced him to retire, Blassie wasn't content to move into the old wrestlers' home. Instead, he became one of the top heel managers in the business, bringing in anti-American wrestlers such as Spiros Arion, Killer Khan, Mr. Saito, Victor Rivera, Peter Maivia, Mr. Fuji, Nikolai Volkoff, and The Iron Sheik. Blassie also managed Adrian Adonis, Stan Hansen, Jesse Ventura, George Steele, and Dick Murdoch, as well as a young stud named Hulk Hogan.

It was 1983 when he finally got his hands on the WWF World title, as he managed The Iron Sheik to an upset victory over Bob Backlund. Ironically, Sheik would drop the belt in short order to Hogan, his former protege.

Blassie gained a measure of pop culture fame when he appeared in Andy Kaufman's film *Breakfast With Blassie.* In the movie, Blassie played himself—gruff, arrogant, comedic, and oddly endearing. In a word, he was an entertainer.

In 1994, Blassie was inducted into what is now the WWE Hall of Fame. He was given the PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED Editors' Award six years later. In recent years, he appeared on WWE TV as an ambassador of the history of the promotion. He gave an emotional rallying speech to the WWF team as it rallied against the WCW/ECW invasion in 2001. Blassie appeared on *Raw* for the final time on May 12, 2003. Not long after, he was admitted to the hospital for heart and kidney difficulties. He is survived by his wife, Miyako, and three children. □

Just because he retired from competition, it didn't mean "Classy" Freddie had to stop getting physical. Here he attacks Bob Backlund in a dressing room.

independent roundup

By Liz Hunter

ANOTHER SIGN THAT the independent wrestling business is on a downward trend is the closing of what had been considered one of the major indie promotions and the restructuring of another.

Maryland Championship Wrestling will cease operations this summer after its fifth annual **Shane Shamrock** Memorial Cup in July. The Maryland-based company was built around Bone Breakers Pro Wrestling Training Center in 1998. MCW quickly developed a impressive reputation as a solid promotion by using such future stars as **The Hardy Boys**, **Lita**, **Steve Corino**, **Dawn Marie**, and **The Haas Brothers**, as well as veterans like **Yokozuna** and **Jim Cornette**.

MCW/Bone Breakers made its mark in the Mid-Atlantic area by working closely with WWE to provide wrestlers for dark matches at local WWE shows. Bone Breakers was also the training center that produced **Orlando**, one of the newest faces in WWE.

The training end of the company is being bought out by Brain Busters and MCW talent will still be appearing on MEWF shows in the Maryland area.

Eastern Wrestling Alliance, one of the most prominent promotions in Maine, has decided to relocate to Central Massachusetts, giving Chaotic Wrestling their share of the Portland market. Chaotic will continue to use many of the EWA wrestlers as it has for several shows now. The full transition will take place by the fall of this year.

Newly crowned NWA heavyweight champion **A.J. Styles** recently got to defend the title in his hometown of Gainesville, Georgia, on a USA Championship Wrestling show. The "Georgia Mountain Memories—A Night Of Superstars And Legends" card featured some of the brightest young stars of today as well as many of the veterans who rose to prominence in wrestling at that very arena for the NWA and WCW. A crowd of 500 fans crammed into the Georgia Mountain Center to witness A.J.'s hometown defense against **Kid Kash**, which he convincingly won with a Styles clash off the ropes. Also on the card, former WCW announcer **Tony Schiavone** presented several of the legends in attendance with plaques, including **Bobby Eaton**, **Rick Morton**, **Paul Orndorff**, and **Michael Hayes**.

IPW Hardcore Wrestling's **Lennox** showed **Naphtali** that he shouldn't mess with women, even those who are managers. Lennox answered Naphtali's open challenge on IPW's "Gratuitous Violence" card, savagely beating Naphtali with a kendo stick and opening a gouge on his forehead. Naphtali nailed his "fountain of death" finisher once, but Lennox was saved by her charge **Axis**. Naphtali went on to plant

The proud tradition of Maryland Championship Wrestling will sadly come to an end with this year's Shane Shamrock Memorial Cup. Reigning cruiserweight champion Reckless Youth won last year's tournament.

the shapely manager with his Bino driver '98, but the referee stopped his pinfall count after noticing Naphtali's feet on the ropes. As Naphtali argued with the referee, Lennox administered a Bino driver of her own and scored the three-count.

Coastal Real Extreme Wrestling fans can say goodbye to **"Mean" Marc Ash**. He dropped a loser-leaves-town match to **Steffi** on June 14 ... Former Phoenix Championship Wrestling champ **Matt Vandal** has left the promotion to train at the New Japan Dojo in Los Angeles ... NWA East heavyweight champion **Nikita Allanov** was involved in a terrible car accident on May 31. He miraculously walked away from with minor scrapes and bruises, but his hand wounds became infected a few days later ... **Tiger Mulligan** won the Millennium Wrestling Federation heavyweight title by winning a battle royal. Afterward, he was presented the belt by **Bobby Heenan** ... On the same card, Millennium Wrestling Federation's **Todd Hanson** scored an upset victory over **D-Lo Brown**.

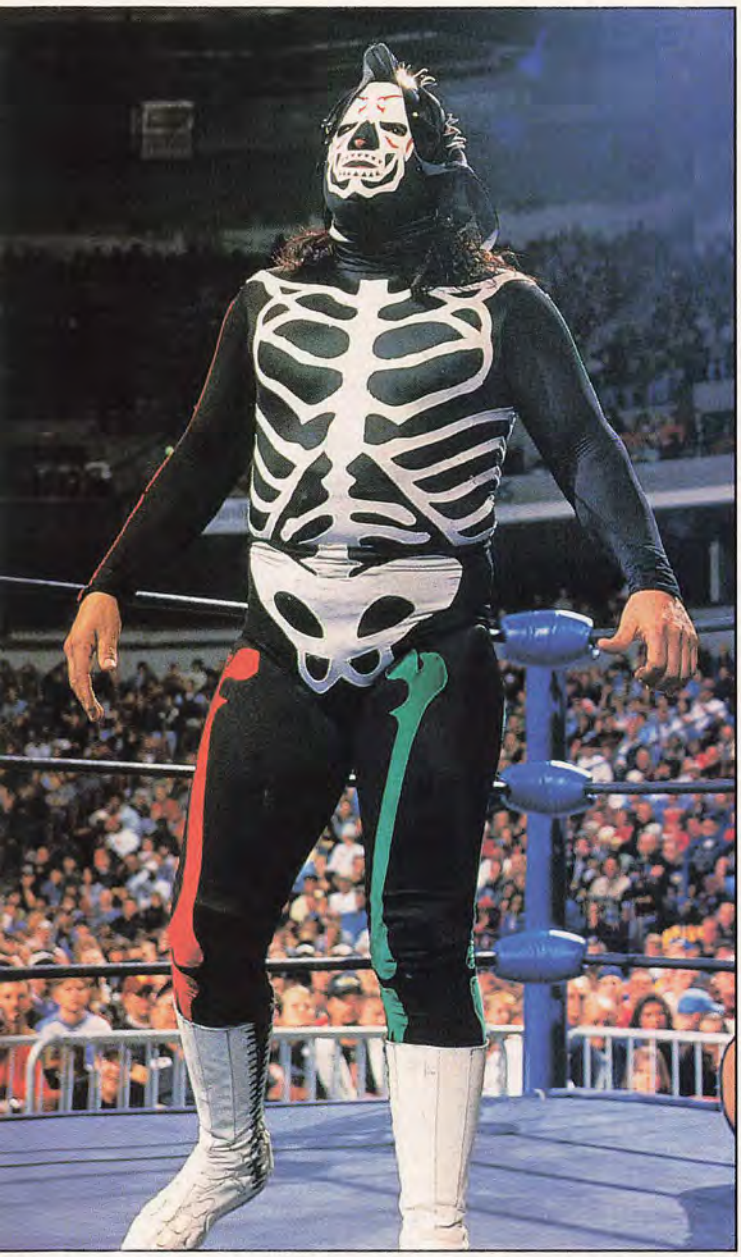
Quick title changes: Susquehanna Wrestling Organization, June 14: **Tiffany Monroe** defeated **Hot Summer** to win the ladies title ... **P.R. Swat** won a fatal four-way tag team match against **Dark Karnival**, **Otto Schtark** & **Harley Watkins**, and **Rob Noxious** & **J-Money** to claim the vacant tag team title ... ***Next Generation Wrestling, June 14:*** **Homeless Pedro** won a three-way match against **Russ Stevens** and **Bryon Michaels** to win the vacant light heavyweight title ... **Deacon Hobbs** won the heavyweight title in a gauntlet match ... ***Coastal Real Extreme Wrestling, June 14:*** **Chris Escobar** beat **Brandon Day** to become the new lightweight champion ... **Tre-G** beat **Timber** to become the new Extreme champion ... ***Xtreme Championship Wrestling, June 13:*** **John Allen** pinned **Epi the Phat Samoan** to win the TV title ... **Krusher Kong** beat **Hellraiser Hark** to win the heavyweight title ... ***Neo Pro Wrestling, June 13:*** **Pete Huge** defeated **Shawn Davari** to win the cruiserweight title ... ***Bull Power Wrestling, June 14:*** **Soul Brotha I** pinned **Red Lightning** to win the U.S. title ... **Malice** won a barbed wire triple-threat match against **Venom** and **Steve Stardom** to win the Hardcore title ... ***Wrestling All Stars Promotion, June 15:*** **Spanish Fly** defeated **Hung Lo** to win the vacant TV title ... **Much 2 Much** defeated **Klub X-treme** to win the tag team title ... ***United Pro Wrestling Coalition, June 14:*** **J. Marcus Lawson** defeated **Righteous Rider** for the light heavyweight title ... **The Mad Trucker** defeated **Big Daddy Cole** to win the heavyweight title ... ***Premiere Wrestling Alliance, June 14***: **Robbie Race** pinned **Menace** to become the new heavyweight champion ... **Jason Maxx** won the extreme rumble to become the first-ever Ironman champion ... ***Phoenix Championship Wrestling at Tom's River High School East, June 14:*** **Donnie Bon Jovi** won a three-way elimination match against **Frankie Kazarian** and **Mike Kruel** to win the TV title ... **The Moxie Family** defeated **Kappa Tappa Kegga** to become the new tag team champions ... ***New Empire Wrestling Results, June 15:*** **Ric Converse** defeated **Bounty Hunter** to win the vacant Regional title ... **Kurt Solo** & **Brad Attitude** defeated **Rob McBride** & **Paco Loco** for the vacant tag title ... **J-Money** won a three-way dance against **Corey Edsel** & **Malaki** to win the vacant National title ... ***NAWA Ring Champions, June 14:*** **The Longshots** defeated **Phil Heffner** & **John Arden** to win the NAWA tag team title ... ***IPW Hardcore Wrestling, June 14:*** **Comic Book Guy Anderson** defeated TV champ **Mark Zout** to win the title ... **Ricky & Tommy Vandal** defeated NWA Florida tag champs **The Shane Brothers** to win the title. □

Northeast fans will no longer be able to watch Matt Vandal in the ring. He's left the East Coast to train at the New Japan Dojo in Los Angeles.

the international report

By Mike Spillane

BREAKING FROM AND disrespecting the traditions of pro wrestling has become commonplace in the United States, even to the point at which storylines are created around it. However, in Mexico, the traditions of Lucha Libre are rarely deviated from, and when they are, controversy is sure to ensue. Using a mask to conceal one's identity is a pivotal characteristic of the Lucha style, so much so that in some 50-plus years of wrestling in Mexico, only one man—**Eddie Guerrero**—has *voluntarily* unmasked and broken from tradition. Protecting one's identity provides one of the great mysteries of Lucha. That's why when the man WCW fans knew as **La Parka** revealed to an audience in Cuernavaca that his real name is **Adolfo Tapia**, the reaction was a stunned silence.



The fact that La Parka revealed himself to be Adolfo Tapia at a big show in Mexico probably won't faze many American fans, but it was a huge story in Mexico, where the La Parka has been at the center of a huge controversy.

Since departing AAA, the man we knew as La Parka has been battling **Antonio Pena**, the AAA promoter, for the rights to the name. Pena claims dominion over the character he created, and went so far as to put someone else in the costume and promote his own La Parka as a main-event player on AAA cards throughout Mexico. The original La Parka is a regular on the independent circuit in Mexico, and sometimes in the U.S., but had been calling himself **La Parka Original** in some towns to distinguish himself from his AAA replacement.

That did not satisfy Pena, and in a recent court ruling, Pena won the rights to the name La Parka, forcing Tapia to change his name to **La *Park* Original**. Because the original and his clone wear virtually identical outfits and masks, Tapia decided to clear the air and avoid confusion by stating his name for the record before a huge audience, instantly making headlines. Never before had a masked wrestler revealed his name in such fashion.

Tapia was backed up by **Pierroth Jr.**, who affirmed that he is the original item, and both men told fans not to be fooled by Pena and his new version of the character. How the revelation of his real name will affect his career in Mexico is not yet clear, but it probably has the AAA La Parka, **Super Parka**, and the bogus American La Parka (yes, a third version!) a little worried. Promoters will know who to talk to when booking the real La Parka, and while fans might not recognize his face, they are a little closer to understanding this fascinating Lucha Libre character.

Riki Choshu's WJ Pro group has announced it will crown its first champion this summer. The group has featured wrestlers like **Takao Omori**, **The Road Warriors**, and **Genichiro Tenryu** on its tours, but hasn't been drawing the kinds of crowds one would expect from name performers. To help boost ticket sales, Choshu has challenged his protege **Kensuke Sasaki**, a former IWGP heavyweight champion, to face him in the opening

round of the championship tournament, which will be underway by the time you read this.

Some international exposure has certainly helped WJ Pro of late, as it recently promoted the first wrestling match between two active senators in the Japanese Diet. **Hiroshi Hase** battled **Atsushi Onita** on a recent card that had the media out in force. Although probably not indicative of his political methods, Onita used a knife and blew mist in Hase's face during the course of the match, which ended in a no-contest. Recently elected senator **Great Sasuke** hopes that similar exposure will help his Michinoku Pro group in the extreme northeast quadrant of the country. Sasuke has been getting plenty of publicity as the first-ever masked politician, even though newly passed laws will prohibit him from wearing his mask while in session.

Pro Wrestling NOAH has come to terms on a new TV deal—only it's for programming in the United Kingdom, not Japan. B-Sky-B has been trying to put together a block of wrestling programming featuring early All-Japan and New Japan footage, as well as 1970s European wrestling. One of Great Britain's top stars, **Doug Williams**, has become a regular with NOAH in 2003, and he will no doubt be a featured player on the British telecasts. When the new block of programming begins airing in August, NOAH might well be the only promotion with current episodes airing, as all the other footage B-Sky-B has pursued is at least 20 years old.

One of the biggest interpromotional shows to hit England in years took place in May. Six wrestlers from American independent Ring of Honor battled six wrestlers from the United Kingdom-based Frontier Wrestling Alliance. The event took place in London and drew one of the biggest crowds in FWA history. The show ended with **Christopher Daniels**, representing Ring of Honor, defeating **Jody Fleisch** (FWA) to give the American contingent the deciding win. Both Daniels and Fleisch have great international followings dating back to a tournament held by Michinoku Pro in the late-'90s, in which Fleisch wrestled as the masked **Doc Chan**, and Daniels first donned the hood of **Curry Man**. The British wrestlers will get a chance to avenge their loss at an upcoming event, with a date and venue to be announced.

All-Japan Pro Wrestling has fallen on hard times, which doesn't reflect well on President **Keiji Muto**, who took the reigns from **Motoko Baba** just last year. Attendance has been so low at some recent events that some of the wrestlers have commented to the media that they feel Muto is a failure as president. To try to generate new interest, Muto and **Satoshi Kojima**, both defectors from New Japan, are appearing together in a major motion picture called *Zistsuroku Hitman Hokkaino Tora Obkyu,* to be released later in the year. Kojima told reporters at a recent press conference that while the movie has conflicted with their wrestling schedule to a minor degree, ultimately it will help bring new fans into the All-Japan fold.

Christopher Daniels scored a big win for the entire Ring of Honor crew when he defeated Jody Fleisch, representing the Britain-based Frontier Wrestling Alliance, to give ROH the edge in a thrilling series of matches between athletes from the two promotions.

Ultimo Dragon, who recently debuted in WWE, has made preparations to turn over control of his Toryumon promotion to the businessmen who helped him organize the school and training facilities. His latest group of trainees, called Toryumon X, are fantastic high-flyers, almost the exact opposite of his T2P group, a class of submission-based trainees. The top star of Toryumon X, **Taizi Ishimori**, uses a backward 450 into an elbowdrop that baffles even the Toryumon's announcing team. Ishimori got his first major win at a recent Toryumon show in Mexico, defeating **Super Crazy** for the vacant UWA welterweight title. He has quite a ways to go, though. Some of Ultimo's other prize students, including **CIMA** and **Milano Collection AT**, have already gone on to become international superstars. □

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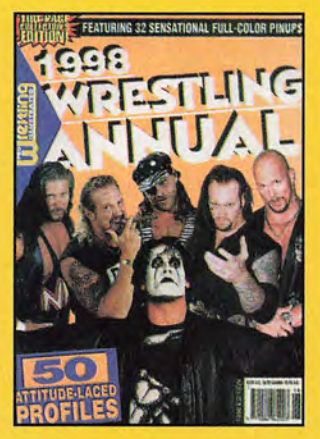

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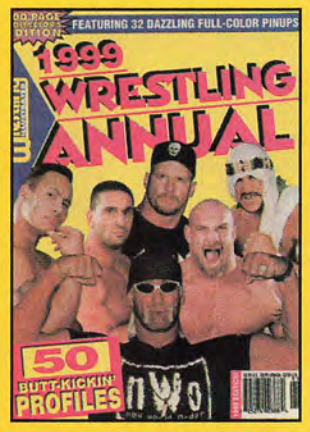

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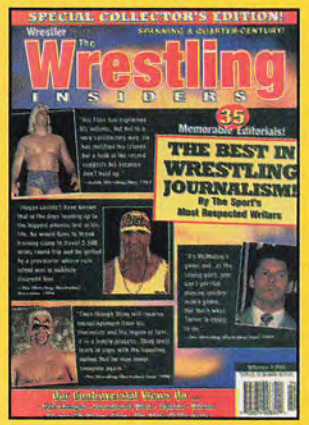
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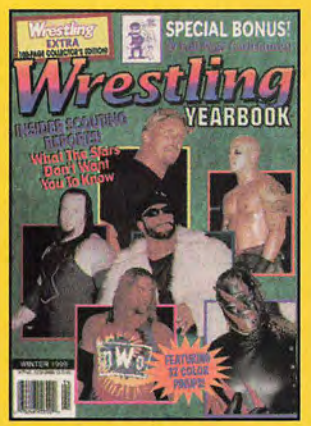

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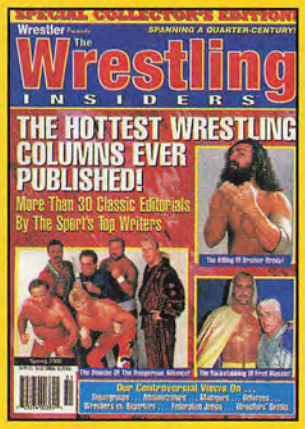

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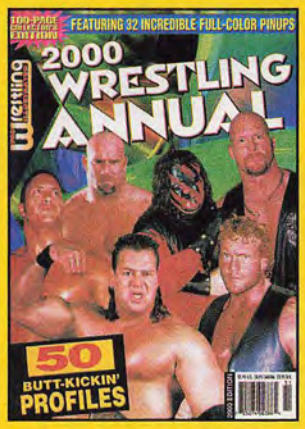

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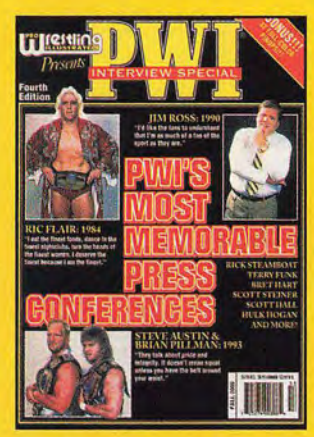

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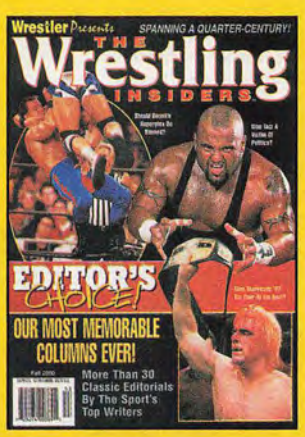

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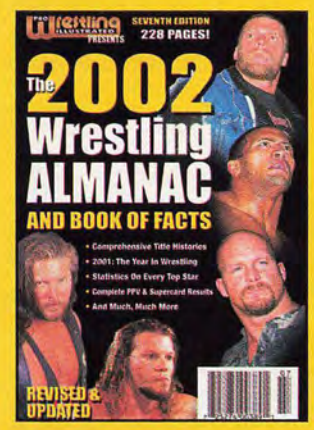
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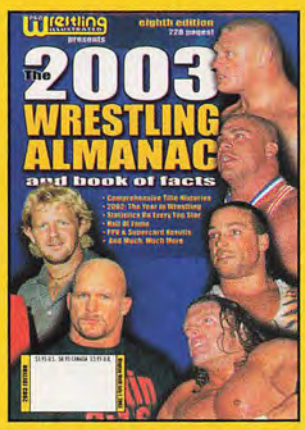

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Spotlight Card of the Month

MIAMI, FL—*WWE Sunday Night Heat* taping/*Raw* live telecast at the American Airlines Arena: **Rico** beat **Norman Smiley** ... **Test** pinned **Spike Dudley** ... **Garrison Cade** beat **Chad Collyer** ... **Val Venis** beat **Scoot Andrews** ... **Christopher Nowinski** beat **Maven** ... **Bill Goldberg** pinned **Rosey** ... **Rob Van Dam** pinned **Rene Dupree** ... **Trish Stratus** & **Ivory** defeated **Jazz** & **Victoria** ... **Scott Steiner** pinned **Lance Storm** ... **Randy Orton** pinned **The Hurricane** ... **Rodney Mack** defeated **D-Von Dudley** by submission.
(06-09-03)

—"Spotlight" photos by Duane Long

UNITED STATES

ALABAMA

HARTFORD—American Wrestling Federation at the Johnny Hughes Community Center: **Sinn** pinned **Kris Korrupt** ... **Backdraft** defeated **Street Bandit** ... **Kid USA** defeated **Lost Avenger** and **Daredevil** in a triple threat, no-disqualification match ... **Mr. Fantasy** wrestled **The Assassin** to a double-disqualification ... **Curtis LeRoy** and **Jason Hero** wrestled to a no-contest ... **Blake Richards** pinned **The Confederate Kid** ... AWF champion **Ceazar** pinned **Forsaken.**
(05-31-03)

—Mike Huggins

DOTHAN—WWE at the Civic Center: **Bill DeMott, Rikishi, & Spanky** beat **Nunzio, Chuck Palumbo, & Johnny Stamboli** ... **Crash Holly** beat **Orlando Jordan** ... **A-Train & Kanyon** defeated **The Basham Brothers** ... **Rhyno** pinned **Sean O'Haire** ... Cruiserweight champion **Matt Hardy** wrestled to a no-contest with **Rey Misterio Jr.** and **Jamie Noble** in a three-way match ... Smackdown tag team champions **Eddie Guerrero & Tajiri** beat **Shelton Benjamin & Charlie Haas** by disqualification ... **Chris Benoit** defeated **John Cena** ... **Nidia** beat **Torrie Wilson (Dawn Marie** was the guest referee) ... Smackdown champion **Brock Lesnar** pinned **The Big Show.**
(05-26-03)

—Kevin Creed

ARKANSAS

HARRISBURG—All Star Wrestling Federation at the National Guard Armory: **Jeremy Blaze** wrestled Scott Fury to a double-countout ... **J.T. West** defeated **Hillbilly Nate** in a slop bucket match ... Tag team champions **Ray Ray & Ice** beat **Kid Krazy & Colt** ... **Austin Lane** defeated **Sensational Shawn & Shorty the Referee** in a handicap match ... Heavyweight champion **Loose Cannon** defeated **Titanic** ... **Sam Dollar** defeated **Derrick Schropelle** in a "lights out" match.
(06-14-03)

—Bryan Underwood

CALIFORNIA

SACRAMENTO—WWE at Arco Arena: **John Cena** defeated **Billy Gunn** ... **Funaki & Spanky** beat **Crash Holly & Shannon Moore** ... **Kanyon** defeated **Orlando Jordan** ... Cruiserweight champion **Matt Hardy** beat **Jamie Noble** ... **Bill DeMott, Rey Misterio Jr., & Rikishi** beat **A-Train & The Basham Brothers** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Eddie Guerrero & Tajiri** beat **Shelton Benjamin & Charlie Haas** ... **Chris Benoit** beat **Sean O'Haire** by submission ... **Nidia** beat **Torrie Wilson (Dawn Marie** was the guest referee) ... **Brock Lesnar & The Undertaker** beat **Chuck Palumbo, Nunzio, & Johnny Stamboli** in a handicap match.
(06-02-03)

—Lester Valentine

OAKLAND—WWE at the Arena: **John Cena** pinned **Billy Gunn** ... **Funaki & Spanky** beat **Crash Holly & Shannon Moore** ... **Kanyon** pinned **Orlando Jordan** ... Cruiserweight champion **Matt Hardy** defeated **Jamie Noble** ... **Bill DeMott, Rikishi, & Rey Misterio Jr.** beat **A-Train & The Basham Brothers** ... **Chris Benoit** defeated **Sean O'Haire** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Eddie Guerrero & Tajiri** beat **Shelton Benjamin & Charlie Haas** ... **Nidia** pinned **Torrie Wilson (Dawn Marie** was the guest referee) ... **Brock Lesnar & The Undertaker** beat **Chuck Palumbo, Nunzio, & Johnny Stamboli** in a handicap match.
(06-01-03)

—Kelly Bryant

CLOVERDALE—Pro Wrestling Iron's One-Year Anniversary Show at The Riverbank: **Damyon Dollaz** won a three-way dance against **Jett Taylor & Ryan Drago** ... **Super Diablo & Rockero Del Diablo** defeated **Apollo Kahn & Sal Thomaselli** ... **Sarah Del Ray** defeated **Maxi Minx** ... **Frank Murdoch & Bart Blaxon** beat **Hook Bomberry & Lars Dauger** ... **Donovan Morgan & Tony Jones** defeated **Acid & U.K. Kid** ... GHC Jr. heavyweight champion **Mike Modest** pinned **Vito Thomaselli.**
(05-31-03)

—Michael Veloza

CONNECTICUT

STRATFORD—National Wrestling Superstars at Bunnell High School: Junior heavyweight champion **Kid Kruel** defeated **Dave Webb** ... **Tommy Force & The Icon** defeated **The Power Company** ... Heavyweight champion **Biggie Biggs** beat **Bonecrusher Samson** ... **Rob Eckos** defeated **Josh Daniels** ... **The Patriot** beat **Hasheem Ali** in a flag match ... **The Honky Tonk Man** defeated **Sal Sincere.**
(05-31-03)

—Dorothy Podsvirow

One week before he made his *Raw* debut with an upset pinfall win over the "boring" Lance Storm, Garrison (formerly Lance) Cade proved himself to be just a little better technically than Chad Collyer.

FLORIDA

FORT MYERS—WWE at the TECO Arena: **Bill DeMott, Rikishi,** & **Spanky** defeated **Nunzio, Chuck Palumbo,** & **Johnny Stamboli** ... **Crash Holly** beat **Orlando Jordan** ... **A-Train** & **Kanyon** beat **The Basham Brothers** ... **Rhyno** beat **Sean O'Haire** ... Cruiserweight champion **Matt Hardy** wrestled to a no-contest with **Rey Misterio Jr.** and **Jamie Noble** in a three-way match ... Smackdown tag team champions **Eddie Guerrero** & **Tajiri** beat **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** by disqualification ... **Chris Benoit** beat **John Cena** ... **Torrie Wilson** pinned **Nidia** (**Funaki** was the guest referee) ... Smackdown champion **Brock Lesnar** beat **The Big Show.**
(05-25-03)

—Kenny Johnson

CHIPLEY—American Wrestling Federation at the Old Roulhac Gym: **D-Money** pinned **Backdraft** ... **Aeon Flexx** pinned **Confederate Kid** ... **Forsaken** defeated **Jason Hero** by disqualification ... **Curtis LeRoy** pinned **Mercury McCloud** ... **Chief Little Bear** and **Raine Quapone** defeated **Assassin** and **Kris Korupt** by disqualification to retain the AWF tag team title ... **Sinn** pinned **B.G. James** ... **Ceazar** pinned **Blake Richards** to become the new AWF champion.
(05-17-03)

—Kyle Niblett

GEORGIA

ROME—NAWA Ring Champions at Dillard's Music Park: **Iceberg** & **Terry Ray Gordy Jr.** defeated **Nemesis** & **Drew Delight** ... **Rick Morton** defeated **Chris Kamikaze** ... **The Longshots** defeated **Phil Heffner** & **John Arden** to win the NAWA tag team title ... **Bulldog Raines** defeated **Billy Love** ... **Tank** defeated **Justin Ramey** ... **The Nightmare** defeated **Simon Sermon.**
(06-14-03)

—Genia M. Bennett

ROME—SWF at the SWF Arena: **Mike Reed, J.W. Christian,** & **Bobby Hayes** wrestled **Buzzsaw, Mark Mabry,** & **T-Bone** to a double-disqualification ... **Sharp Dressed Man** beat **H.T.J.** by disqualification ... **Shane Williams** beat **Major Havoc** by disqualification ... **T.W. Green** beat **Dr. Dino Stone** ... **U.S. Kid** won a three-way match against **Apollo** and **Charlie Lawson** for the junior heavyweight championship ... **Morphine** beat **Buster Savage.**
(05-31-03)

—David Futch

CORNELIA—NWA Wildside at the NWA Arena: **T.C. Carnage** & **Martel** defeated **Adam Roberts** & **Zero** ... **Shaun Shultz** defeated **Menace** ... **Salvatore Rinuaro** & **Ace Rockwell** defeated **Nick Halen** ... **Francis** defeated **Todd Sexton** ... **Michael Adrian** defeated **Maxx Mayhem** ... **Brandon Knight** defeated **Scott E.Smooth** by a submission ... **Jeremy V** & **Gabriel** defeated **Rainman** & **Skeeter Frost** ... **Shadow Jackson** defeated 21 other men to win the mega rumble for the evening.
(06-13-03)

—Blaine Jeffries

GAINESVILLE—Georgia USA Championship Wrestling at the Mountain Center: **Derrick Booth** beat **Jimmy Hart** ... **Viscera** beat **Frankie Capone** ... **"Hacksaw" Jim Duggan** beat **The Barbarian** ... **Rick Morton** beat **Bobby Eaton** ... **The Road Warriors** beat **David Taylor** & **Ian Harrison** ... **Ray Gordy** beat **David Flair** ... NWA champion **A.J. Styles** beat **Kid Kash** ... **Konnan** beat **Disco Inferno** ... **Raven** beat **Buff Bagwell.**
(06-13-03)

—Anna Myers

TRION—Roughhouse Championship Wrestling at the RCW Building: **C.C. Devlin** beat **Seth Cruise** ... **The Sarasota Sex Symbol** beat **Slip Knot** ... **Scott Prater** defeated **El Lobo** ... **The Beast** wrestled to a no-contest with **John Arden** ... **The Wall, Michael Cross,** & **Frenchy Riviera** beat **Adam McGraw, Billy Love,** & **Michael Flame** ... **The Nasty Critter** beat **Billy Montana** in a trash can match.
(05-31-03)

—Jennifer Duran

ILLINOIS

PEORIA—Next Generation Wrestling at the Peoria Athletic Club: **Scott Keyes** and **Justin MacIntyre** defeated tag team champions **2 Damn Bad** to win the title ... **Dayvd Fury** defeated **Ryan Phoenix** ... **Homeless Pedro** won a three-way bout against **Russ Stevens** & **Bryon Micheals** to win the vacant light heavyweight champion ... **Cody Cash** and **Johnny Justice** defeated **Grendal** in a hardcore Handicap match ... **Shane Griffin** defeated **Diablo De Azul** and **Cornbred Jed** to advance to the "ace of spades" gauntlet match for the heavyweight title ... **Deacon Hobbs** won the heavyweight title in the gauntlet match that also saw **Shane Griffin** defeat **Chris Hazard, Deacon Hobbs** defeat **Shane Griffin, Deacon Hobbs** defeated **Big Pappa.**
(06-14-03)

—Jason Pemberton

INDIANA

INDIANAPOLIS—Frontier Xtreme Wrestling at the Ramada Inn: **Shawn Cook** beat **Billy Roc** by disqualification ... **Johnny Blaze** beat **Poon Loc** by countout ... **Q-Ball** beat **Dayton Suave** ... **Hillbilly Jed** beat **Indiana Kidd** ... In a gauntlet match, **Rob Kincaid** beat **Seymour 2 Sicc** ... **Rick Ravage** beat **Kincaid** ... **Ravage** beat **Willie Loseagain** ... **Skip Raddison** beat **Don Basher** in a chain match ... **Halo** wrestled **Johnny Blaze** to a no-contest ... **Sean Casey** wrestled FXW champ **Tiny Tim** to a no-contest and the title is now held up.
(06-13-03)

—Rob King

CLARKSVILLE—IWA Mid-South at the IWA Arena: Light heavyweight champion **J.C. Bailey** won a three-way match against **Nate Webb** and **Hy-Zaya** ... **Corporal Robinson** defeated **Brad Bradley** ... **B.J. Whitmer** defeated **Danny Daniels** ... **Mark Wolf** defeated **Chris Hero** to win the IWA Mid-South heavyweight title ... **Ian Rotten** defeated **Mitch Page** in a "Fans Bring The Weapons, $10,000 Bounty On The Head Of Ian Rotten" matchup.
(06-07-03)

—Jim Fannin

KENTUCKY

COVINGTON—Northern Wrestling Federationat the Madison Theater: **Roger Ruffen** defeated **Mack the Knife** by disqualification ... **Ryan Stone** pinned **Zodiac I** ... **Tiny Tim** and **Prince Justice** wrestled to a no-contest ... **Brian Beech** defeated **Tony Bryant** ... **Jay Donaldson** defeated **Austin Meddler** ... **Psycho Sam** pinned **Zodiac II** ... **Dregen** defeated **Chad Allegra** in the lumberjack match .
(06-09-03)

—Kelly Madison

ASHLAND—Championship Professional Wrestling at Prichard Lawn Care: **Suicide Kid** beat **Scab** ... **Brian Jones** pinned **Shane Storm** ... **Victor Stone** pinned **Hannibal** ... **Kris King** beat **Travis Lynn** ... **Death Falcon Zero** wrestled **Bobby Blaze** to a no-contest .
(06-01-03)

—Rachel Bitner

LOUISIANA

LAFAYETTE—LA All Access Wrestling at the AAW Arena: **Hotshot Cassidy** defeated **Jorge Estrada** ... **Joe Kane** beat **Scott Starr** ... **Joey C** beat **Slam Shady** ... **Jacey North** beat **Bull Buchanan** by countout ... **Road Dogg** beat **Sassy Vegas** ... **Brique St. Pierre** beat **David Young** ... **Kevin Northcutt** beat **Sonny Siaki** ... Heavyweight champion **A.J. Styles** beat **Elix Skipper.**
(06-07-03)

—Gayle Hatfield

Val Venis ... Sean Morley ... The Big Valbowski ... Chief Morley ... which is he today? He was Venis when he took on and overwhelmed veteran independent standout Scoot Andrews.

It's the *Tough Enough* feud that won't die! Christopher Nowinski and Maven might never settle their differences. And as long as Nowinski wears that silly mask, he'll always have an edge.

NEW ORLEANS—WWE at the Kiefer Lakefront UNO Arena: **Lance Cade**, **Goldust**, & **Val Venis** beat **Mark Jindrak**, **Lance Storm**, & **Steven Richards** ... Women's champion **Jazz** beat **Trish Stratus**, **Victoria**, and **Molly Holly** in a four-way elimination match ... **Rodney Mack** & **Christopher Nowinski** beat **Spike Dudley** & **Maven** ... **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** beat **Jamal** & **Rosey** in a table match ... Intercontinental champion **Christian** defeated **The Hurricane** ... **Scott Steiner** beat **Rico** ... Raw tag team champions **Kane** & **Rob Van Dam** beat **Rene Dupree** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... Raw champion **Triple-H** defeated **Kevin Nash** by disqualification.
(05-25-03)

—Harry Burkett

BATON ROUGE—WWE at the Riverside Centroplex: **Rodney Mack** & **Christopher Nowinski** beat **Lance Cade** & **John Heidenreich** ... **Goldust** pinned **Mark Jindrak** ... **Lance Storm** beat **Steve Williams** ... **Buh Buh Ray**, **D-Von**, & **Spike Dudley** beat **Jamal**, **Rosey**, & **Rico** in a table match ... Intercontinental champion **Christian** beat **Val Venis** ... Women's champion **Jazz** defeated **Molly Holly**, **Trish Stratus**, and **Victoria** in a four-way elimination match ... Raw tag team champions **Kane** & **Rob Van Dam** beat **Rene Dupree** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... Raw champion **Triple-H** pinned **Scott Steiner**.
(05-24-03)

—Dominick Valenti

BOSSIER CITY—WWE at the CenturyTel Center: **Rodney Mack** & **Christopher Nowinski** beat **Lance Cade** & **John Heidenreich** ... **Mark Jindrak** beat **Goldust** ... Women's champion **Jazz** defeated **Molly Holly**, **Trish Stratus**, and **Victoria** in an elimination match ... **Buh Buh Ray**, **D-Von**, & **Spike Dudley** defeated **Jamal**, **Rosey**, & **Rico** in a table match ... Intercontinental champion **Christian** pinned **Val Venis** ... **Steve Williams** defeated **Lance Storm** ... Raw tag team champions **Kane** & **Rob Van Dam** beat **Rene Dupree** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... Raw champion **Triple-H** defeated **Scott Steiner**.
(05-23-03)

—Harry Burkett

MASSACHUSETTS

TEWKSBURY—Chaotic Wrestling at the Holiday Inn Ballroom: **Arch Kincaid** beat **Antonio Thomas** ... **Handsome Johnny** beat **Aaron Stevens** ... **Tim McNeany** & **Dukes Dalton** won an tag team elimination match over **Adam Booker** & **Frankie Armadillo**, **Brian Black** & **Mini** and **Attrition**, **Studd** & **Angers** ... Heavyweight champion **Luis Ortiz** beat **Matthew Evagrius** ... **Peter Mulloy** beat **Kevin Matthews** ... **Vince Vicallo** beat New England champion **Billy K** in a bar room brawl to regain the title.
(06-06-03)

—Rich Palladino

NORTH ATTLEBORO—NEWA at the Masons Building: **One Man Army** defeated **G.E.D.** ... **The Made Men** beat **The Freaks of Nature** ... **Delicious** beat lost to **John Phear** ... **Bobby Biggens** defeated Bloodstone ... **The Score** beat tag team champions **The Twysted Latin Souls** to become the champs in a "Spanish Harlem Back Alley Brawl"... **Ocho** & **LowLife** defeated **Brian Cario** & **Jason Chaos** ... TV champion **Mike Benoit** beat **Cameron Matthrews** ... **Legion Cage** wrestled **Tim Kilgore** to a time-limit draw ... **Pete Mulloy** defeated **The Mighty Mini** in a streetfight.
(05-31-03)

—Chris Sullivan

MICHIGAN

SAGINAW—Independent Wrestling Revolution & Micro Wrestling Federation at The 6 Shooters Bar: **American Kickboxer** & **Bubba MacKenzie** defeated **Necro Butcher** & **Josh Movado** ... **Lil' Killa** defeated **POD** ... **Ace** beat **Jimmy Spud Buddy** ... **Gutter** defeated **N8 Mattson** & **Big Jay Venom** in a triple threat elimination match ... **TEO** over **Blixx** ... **Klunk the Klown** beat **Badunkadunk** ... MWF champ **Meatball** defeated **Short Dawg** ... **Mad Man Pondo** defeated **Chuck Hogan**.
(06-14-03)

—Tom Peterson

MINNESOTA

COTTAGE GROVE—Neo Pro Wrestling at the Armory: **Kaos** beat **The Neo Dragon** ... **Shimdog** beat **Tommy Gunn** ... **DOS** & **John Johnson** beat **Logan Lasher** & **Mason Quinn** ... **Horace The Psychopath** beat **Pretty Boy Delgado** ... **Pete Huge** beat **Shawn Davari** to win the cruiserweight title ... **Joey E.** beat **Austin Aries** in a ladder match.
(06-13-03)

—Nicholas Loken

ALPENA—Blue Water Championship Wrestling at the Northern Lights Arena: HWA cruiserweight champion **Rory Fox** defeated **Truth Martini** ... **Buckshot** & **Nemisis** beat **Kurt Kaoss** & **Eddie Venom** ... **Guardian** defeated **Doink the Clown** ... **Willie Richardson** & **Germel Quinn** beat **The Canadian Extreme** to become the new BWCW tag team champions ... **The X-Convict** defeated **Li'l J. Dogg** ... **Trik Nasty** beat **Rick Solid** to become the new BWCW cruiserweight champion ... **Even Colder Austin** defeated **Chance Prophet** ... **Allie Spirt** became the new BWCW ladies champion in a gauntlet match by defeating **Khanstance Carleigh**, **Sonya Blackhawk**, **Super J**, **Hailey Hatred**, and **Dixie Lixx** ... **Marcus Bagwell** beat **Sean Casey** in the best-of-three-falls match.
(06-01-03)

—Kevin Regis

TAYLOR—Insane Wrestling Federation at The Taylor SportsPlex: **The Messiah** defeated **Adam Flash** ... **Bryer Wellington** defeated **Anthony Rivera** ... **Mad Man Pondo** defeated **Loverboy Steve** ... **Cash Flo** defeated **Chad Collyer** ... **The DBA** defeated **Mitch Rider** ... **Monty Brown** defeated **Lenny Lane** ... **Kid Kash** defeated **Sharkboy** ... **Corporal Robinson** & **2 Tuff Tony** wrestled **Adam Flash** & **The Messiah** to a double-countout for the IWF tag team title ... **Abdullah the Butcher** defeated **Necro Butcher**.
(05-31-03)

—Aaron McMann

LIVONIA—Maximum Pro Wrestling at The Max Pro Arena: **The Hacker** defeated **Petey Williams** ... **Chad Collyer** defeated **Alex Shelly** ... **Eric Young** defeated **Ruffy Silverstein** ... **Dyson Pryce** defeated **N8 Mattson** ... **Joe E. Legend** defeated **A-1** ... **Chris Sabin** defeated **Truth Martini**.
(05-30-03)

—Aaron McMann

NEW JERSEY

TOMS RIVER—Phoenix Championship Wrestling at Toms River High School East: **Mike Preston** defeated **Josh Daniels** ... **Project Upstart** defeated **Danny the Love Machine** & **Chris Phoenix** ... **Donnie Bon Jovi** won a three-way elimination match against **Frankie Kazarian** and **Mike Kruel** to become the new PCW TV champion ... **Slim Stevie** won a battle royal ... **The Moxie Family** defeated **Kappa Tappa Kegga** to become the new PCW tag team champions ... **Joe Gunns** defeated **"Rowdy" Bobby Piper** ... **Johnny Steele** defeated **Rage** ... **Slayer** defeated **Lil' Ricky** in the dog collar hair cut match ... **Powerchild** defeated **Tiger Khan** in a flag match ... **Matt Vandal** defeated **Monsta Mack**.
(06-14-03)

—Billy McGraw

GARFIELD—Jersey Championship Wrestling at the Garfield Boys & Girls: Tag champs **Los Boricuas** beat **Azrael** & **Christopher Idol** ... **Johnny Ova** defeated **Rob Eckos** ... JCW champion **Don Montoya** defeated **Chaos** ... **Jay Lethal** defeated **Livewyre** in a lumberjack match ... **Dirty Money** beat **John Walters** ... **Dan Maff** beat **Kruel** ... **Team Ethic** defeated **The Midcard Express** ...

Shawn Sheridan defeated **Damian Dragon** ... **Ace Darling** defeated **Josh Daniels** in best-of-three-falls match ... **Homicide** defeated **C.M. Punk** by submission.
(06-08-03)

—Brett A. Schwan

NEVADA

LAS VEGAS—WWE at the Thomas & Mack Center: **Chris Benoit** defeated **Sean O'Haire** ... **Crash Holly** beat **Funaki** ... **Orlando Jordan** defeated **Kanyon** ... Cruiserweight champion **Matt Hardy** pinned **Jamie Noble** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Eddie Guerrero** & **Tajiri** beat **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** ... **A-Train** & **The Basham Brothers** beat **Bill DeMott, Spanky,** & **Rey Misterio Jr.** ... **Torrie Wilson** defeated **Nidia** (**Funaki** was the guest referee) ... **John Cena** pinned **Rikishi** ... **Brock Lesnar** & **The Undertaker** beat **Chuck Palumbo, Nunzio,** & **Johnny Stamboli** in a handicap match.
(05-31-03)

—Gordon Smythe

LAS VEGAS—Ultimate Wrestling Federation at the UWF Arena: **The Riggs** beat **Funnybone** and **Frank Psycho** ... **Nightcrawler** beat **Gigolo** ... **Kid USA** beat **Bela** and **Jimmy Daniels** ... Nevada State champion **Sinful** beat **Major Maniac** ... **Solo Snuka** beat **Tekniq** ... **Johnny Riggs** defeated **X** to become NEW UWF champion.
(05-30-03)

—Shaun Daily

NEW MEXICO

ALBUQUERQUE—WWE at The Pit: Intercontinental champion **Christian** pinned **Booker T** ... Women's champion **Jazz** beat **Ivory, Victoria,** and **Jacquelyn** in a four-way match ... **Goldust** & **Maven** defeated **Mark Jindrak** & **Lance Storm** ... **Rico** defeated **Lance Cade** ... **Rodney Mack** & **Christopher Nowinski** beat **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** ... Raw tag team champions **Kane** & **Rob Van Dam** beat **Rene Dupree** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... **Val Venis** defeated **Test** ... Raw champion **Triple-H** defeated **Kevin Nash** by disqualification.
(06-01-03)

—Steve Drew

NORTH CAROLINA

WINSTON-SALEM—New Empire Wrestling at the VFW Facility: **Grease** won a royal rumble battle royal ... **Dr. Ex** defeated **Brass Munkey** ... **Ric Converse** defeated **Bounty Hunter** to win the vacant regional title ... **Kurt Solo** & **Brad Attitude** defeated **Rob McBride** & **Paco Loco** for the vacant tag title ... **J-Money** defeated **Corey Edsel** & **Malaki** in a three-way dance to win the vacant National title.
(06-15-03)

—Tara Rheaume

EDENTON—Coastal Real Extreme Wrestling at the Old Edenton Armory: **B.J. Winger** & **Marchocias** beat **Chris Derringer** & **Marty Reed** by disqualification ... **Deacon** beat **Patient 6D6** ... **Chris Escobar** beat **Brandon Day** to become the new Lightweight champion ... **John Thundercloud** beat **Gluteus Maximus** ... **Steffi** beat **Marc Ash** in a "loser-leaves-CREW" match ... **Damian Wayne** & **Mike Booth** beat **Dirty Money** & **Phil Brown** ... Tre-G beat Exreme champion Timber to win the title ... **The Stro** beat **Preston Quinn** by disqualification
(06-14-03)

—Josh Anderson

PFAFFTOWN—United Pro Wrestling Coalition at the West Central Community Center: **Sweet Daddy** defeated **Indian Outlaw** ... **J. Marcus Lawson** defeated **Righteous Rider** for the light heavyweight title ... **Shane West** defeated **The American Shadow** ... **East Coast Bodily Harm** defeated **The SouthSide Playas** ... **Cory Edsel** wrestled **IronHorse** to a double-countout ... Carolina champion **Mr. Smooth** defeated **Grease** ... **The Mad Trucker** defeated **Big Daddy Cole** to win the heavyweight title.
(06-14-03)

—Tara Rheaume

GOLDSBORO—American Wrestling Federation at the Goldsboro Chyrsler Dealership: **Seymour Snott** beat **Steve Michaels** ... **The Brute** beat **Trailer Park Heat** ... **Viper** beat **Romeo** ... **Viper** beat **The Pitbull** ... **Flex Phenom** beat **Seymour Snott** ... **Frank Parker** beat **Otto Schwanz**.
(06-14-03)

—Carl Evans

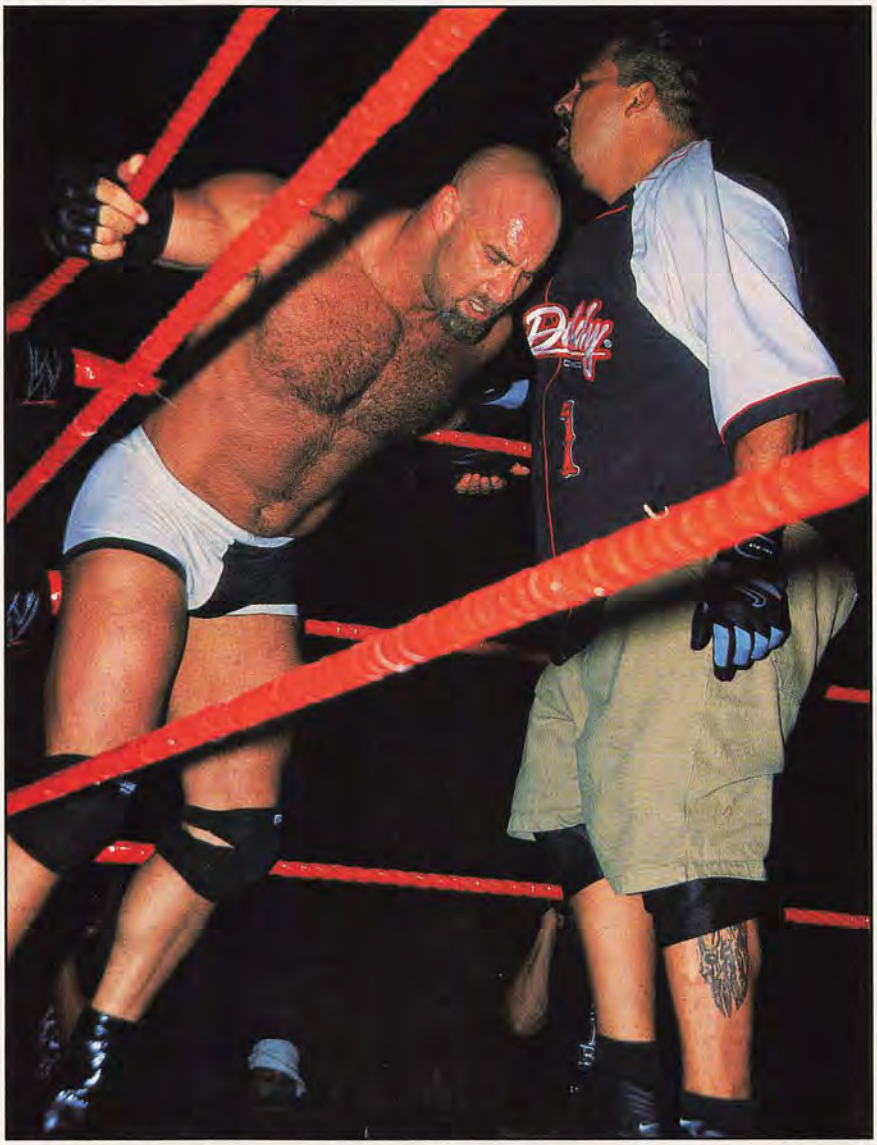
BURLINGTON—CWF & FWA-Carolinas at Club CWF: **Kid Justice, Stephen O'Hara** & **Mark Slain** defeated **Kenny James, Trent Wylde,** & **Magic Moon** ... **Brass Munkey** & **American Steel Ninja** defeated **Drake Tungsten** & **Hugh B. Johnson** ... **Nemisis** defeated RGL champion **Kamikaze Kid** in a non-title match ... **Brad Attitude** defeated **Gemini Kid** ... **Mikael Yamaha** defeated **Brad Rainz** ... Cruiserweight champ **J-Money** defeated **Xsiris** ... **Amber Holly** defeated **Special K** ... Heavyweight champ **Corey Edsel** won the "six pack heavyweight title" match over **Ric Converse, Kurt Solo, Otto Schwanz, Makaki,** and **Bounty Hunter.**
(05-31-03)

—Tara Rheaume

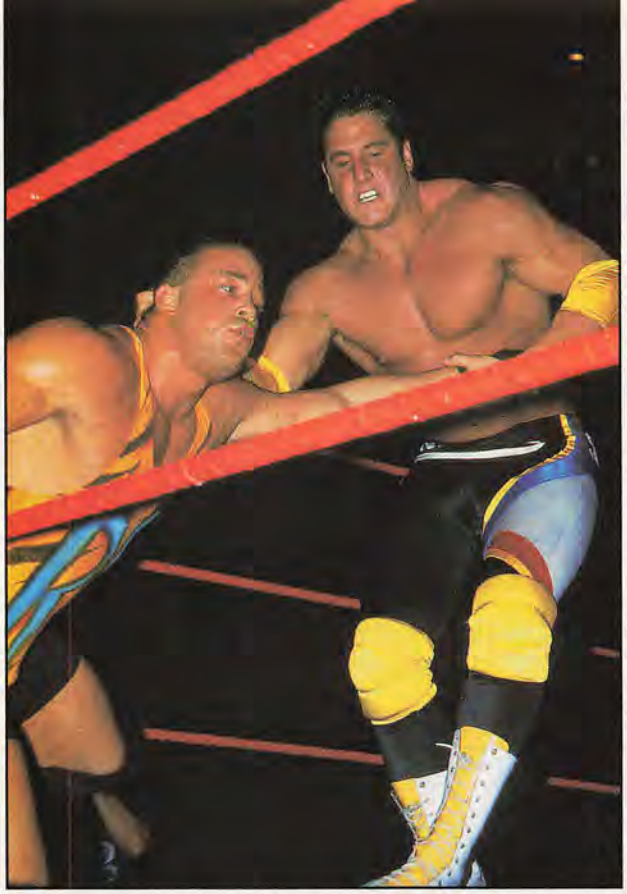
OHIO

CLEVELAND—Wrestling All Stars Promotion at The Lebanon Hall: **Denver** won a 15 man battle royal ... **Kidrageous** defeated **Soloman Mosby** ... **Mike McDiddy** defeated **Kid Bielick** ... Cruiserweight champ **Spence Slater** defeated **Eric Van Kaster** ... **Hellfire** & **Rob Stone** defeated **The B-Town Posse** ... **Twitch** defeated **Kano** ... **Spanish Fly** defeated **Hung Lo** to win the vacant TV title ... Universal champ **J-Rocc** defeated **Sheik Hassan** ... **Much 2 Much** defeated tag team champs **Klub X-treme** to win the title.
(06-15-03)

—Ty Brown



Rosey didn't get in much offense against Goldberg in their *Raw* match, but then again, would anyone have been surprised if he had gotten in none at all?



Rene Dupree must have to pinch himself now and then to make sure he's not dreaming. Just 19 years old and wrestling in WWE! He couldn't quite beat RVD on this night, though.

OKLAHOMA

TULSA—WWE at the Convention Center: **Scott Steiner** beat **Test** ... **Mark Jindrak** beat **Spike Dudley** ... **Lance Storm** beat **Lance Cade** ... **Trish Stratus** beat **Molly Holly** and **Victoria** in a three-way match ... **Rodney Mack** & **Christopher Nowinski** beat **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** ... **Rico** defeated **Tommy Dreamer** ... Intercontinental champion **Christian** pinned **Booker T** ... Raw tag team champions **Kane** & **Rob Van Dam** beat **Rene Dupree** & **Sylvan Grenier**.
(06-14-03)

—Frank Krewda

TULSA—Tornado Pro Wrestling at Salon Azul: **Romero Contreras** defeated **Ron Mac** ... **Brian Lakewood** defeated **Shane Morbid** ... Light heavyweight champion **Outcast** defeated **Deuce Rodriguez** & **X-Cal** in a triple threat match ... **Terry Montana** defeated **Shadow of Death I** in a hardcore match ... Oklahoma champion **Sonny C** defeated **Karl Davis** ... **Justin Lee** defeated **The Candian Luchadore** ... **Anthony Jackson** defeated TPW champion **Rocco Valentino** for the title.
(05-31-03)

—Chris Burnham

OREGON

PORTLAND—WWE at the Rose Garden: Intercontinental champion **Christian** defeated **Booker T** ... **Goldust** & **Maven** beat **Mark Jindrak** & **Lance Storm** ... Women's champion **Jazz** beat **Ivory**, **Jacquelyn**, & **Victoria** in a four-way match ... **Rico** defeated **Lance Cade** ... **Rodney Mack** & **Christopher Nowinski** beat **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** ... Raw tag team champions **Kane** & **Rob Van Dam** beat **Rene Dupree** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... **Test** defeated **Val Venis** ... Raw champion **Triple-H** beat **Kevin Nash**.
(05-31-03)

—Matt Brock

PENNSYLVANIA

YORK—Susquehanna Wrestling at the Hannah Penn Middle School: Night Prowler beat Armageddon ... **New York Panther** defeated **Mr. Blackwell** ... WWWA ladies champion **Tiffany Monroe** defeated **Hot Summer** for the vacant SWO ladies title ... **Shane Shadows** beat **Brayden Shockker** ... **P.R. Swat** won a four-way tag team match against **Dark Karnival**,**Otto Schtark** & **Harley Watkins**, **Rob Noxious** & **J-Money** to win the vacant tag title ... **Nikolai Volkoff** beat **Nick Castle** ... **The Enforcers** defeated **The Wolfman** & **The Fenix** ... SWO champion **Dimitrius Arion** defeated **Tyler Symz** ... **Ravage** defeated **Y-Kushi** ... **Glen Osbourne** defeated **Max Thrasher** ... **Larry Zbyszko** defeated the heavyweight champion **Johnny Graham**.
(06-14-03)

—Stu Leppo

PHILADELPHIA—CZW at Viking Hall: **Nick Gage** won a three-way match against **Nate Hatred** and **Messiah** in a steel cage become BJW death match champion ... **Sonjay Dutt** defeated **Deranged** ... **Jon Dahmer** defeated **Niles Young** and **The Grim Reefer** in a three-way match ... **Ian Knoxx**, **Adam Flash**, & **Danny Rose** defeated **Z-Barr**, **Greg Matthews**, & **Derek Frazier** ... **GQ** defeated **Chris Cash** ... **B-Boy** defeated **Jimmy Rave** ... **Tony Mamaluke** and **Reckless Youth** defeated **Nick Berk** by simultaneous submissions ... Junior heavyweight champion **Ruckus** defeated **Ric Blade** in a title match ... Tag team champions **The Backseat Boyz** defeated **The Briscoe Brothers** in a title match ... **Rebel** defeated **Zandig** in an "I Quit" strap match.
(06-14-03)

—Pete Stevens

ALLENTOWN—CHIKARA at St. John's Auditorium: **Reckless Youth** defeated **Mike Kruel** by disqualification ... **Icarus** pinned Young Lions Cup champion **Hallowicked** in a non-title match ... **Eddie Kingston** & **Jack Marciano** beat **Ultra-Mantis** & **Mister ZERO** in an "I Quit" match ... **Jigsaw** pinned **Gran Akuma** ... **Mike Quackenbush** wrestled to a 30-minute time-limit draw with **Blind Rage** in a best-of-three-falls match (each man won one fall before time expired).
(06-13-03)

—Timothy A. Walker

LANCASTER—World Star Wrestling at the Brunswick Ramada: **Manslaughter** beat **Braydon Shocker** ... WSW cruiserweight champion **Danny Rage** beat **I.B. Green** ... **Matt Turner** beat **Heavy Metal Maniac** ... **Harry Acropolis** beat **Sheik Hassam Casey** ... **Doink the Clown** beat **Steve the Teacher** ... **Suicide** beat **Derick Wayne** and **Buck Chow** in a three-way dance ... **Summer** beat **Cannonball** ... **Nikolai Volkoff** beat **Kage** ... **Ring Crew** beat **Blaze N Glory** by disqualification ... Heavyweight champion **Donny Brass** wrestled **The Bodyguard** to a no-contest.
(06-07-03)

—Matt Dillon

McKEESPORT—NWA East at the Sportatorium: **Scott Venom** defeated **Crusher Hansen** ... **Bigg** defeated **Virus** ... **Brian Anthony** defeated **Dash Bennett** by submission ... **Dirk Ciglar** & **Scottie Gash** defeated **Quinn Magnum** & **Paul Atlas** ... **Mad Mike** defeated **Darkstar** ... **Brandon K** defeated **Kid Cupid**, **Daron Smythe**, and **Devin Devine** in a gauntlet match ... **Justin Idol** defeated **C.J. Sensation** in match one of the "best of five" series for the NWA East Three Rivers championship
(06-07-03)

—Phil Berry

READING—World Professional Wrestling at the Beneficial Association Arena: ***Semifinal matches of a tournament to crown the first WPW lightweight champion:*** **Vince Bono** beat **Vulcan** ... **Damien Adams** beat **Rob Eckos** ... ***Finals:*** Bono beat Adams to win the tournament and the title ... **Jeff Grippley** beat **Jack Bailey** ... **Simply Luscious** defeated **Aleree** ... **New Wave** beat **Din-Mark** ... **Pinky the Flamingo Kid** beat **Dino Divine** ... **Rapid Fire Maldonado** beat **Patch Jabronie** ... **The Himalayan Players** beat **Krash Krew** and **The Hooch Holla Boys** in a three-way dance.
(06-06-03)

—Barry J. Walker

MONROEVILLE—International Wrestling Cartel at Spitzer Toyota: **Shirley Doe** wrestled **Dustin Ardine** to a no-contest ... **Super Hentai** & **Dustin Ardine** defeated **Shirley Doe** & **Sterling Keenan** ... **Al B. Damm** pinned **Carlton Kaz** ... **Glenn Spectre** pinned **J.T. Rodgers** ... Heavyweight champion **Jimmy Vegas** pinned **T. Rantula** ... **Bubba the Bulldog** defeated **The Mysterious X**.
(05-31-03)

—Joe Dombrowski

CLEARFIELD—KCW at the YMCA: **The Hardliners** defeated **Big Lenny** & **The Bubbster** ... **Zubov** pinned **Mercury Flash** ... Tag team champions **Youth Gone Wild** beat **Robert Shields** & **Jesse Springfield** ... **Kasanova Kato** and **Dr. Feelgood** wrestled to a no-contest ... **Julio Dinero** pinned heavyweight champion **Sebastian** to win the title.
(05-24-03)

—Steve Kardolly

TENNESSEE

NASHVILLE—NWA-TNA pay-per-view at the Fairgrounds Coliseum: **D-Lo Brown**, **Frankie Kazarian**, & **The Sandman** defeated **Don Harris**, **Sonny Siaki**, & **David Young** ... NWA-TNA X champion **Chris Sabin** beat **Paul London** ... **New Jack** defeated **Mike Sanders** in a Hard 10 Tournament match (a wrestler scores one point for each weapon shot he uses on an opponent and five for putting an opponent through a table, and the first to reach 10 points wins) ... **Justin Credible** pinned **Jerry Lynn** ... **Kenzo Suzuki** wrestled to a no-contest with **Perry Saturn** ... NWA tag team champions **Christopher Daniels** & **Elix Skipper** beat **Chris Harris** & **James Storm** ... **Jeff Jarrett** & **Sting** defeated **A.J. Styles** & **Syxx-Pac**.
(06-18-03)

—Harry Burkett

NASHVILLE—NWA-TNA pay-per-view at the Fairgrounds Coliseum: **D-Lo Brown** pinned **Julio Dinero** ... NWA-TNA X champion **Chris Sabin** defeated **Shark Boy** ... **Ron Killings** & **Konnan** defeated **Don** & **Ron Harris** ... **Kid Kash** beat **Goldylocks** & **Trinity** in a handicap match ... **The Sandman** defeated **Devon Storm** in a Hard 10 Tournament match ... **Chris Harris** & **James Storm** beat **David Young** & **Tracy** ... **A.J. Styles** defeated NWA heavyweight champion **Jeff Jarrett** and **Raven** in a three-way match to win the title.
(06-11-03)

—Frank Miller

NASHVILLE—NWA-TNA pay-per-view at the Fairgrounds Coliseum: **Frankie Kazarian**, **C.M. Punk**, & **Matt Stryker** defeated **Damian Dothart**, **Johnny Swinger**, & **Kid Romeo** ... **Sonny Siaki** defeated **Vampire Warrior** (a.k.a. **Gangrel**) in a Hard 10 Tournament match ... **David Young** & **Tracy** defeated **Ron Killings** in a handicap match ... **Chris Harris** & **James Storm** beat **B.G. James** & **Konnan** ... **A.J. Styles** pinned **D-Lo Brown** ... NWA heavyweight champion **Jeff Jarrett** pinned **Glenn Gilberti**.
(06-04-03)

—Michael Krebbs

NASHVILLE—NWA-TNA pay-per-view at the Fairgrounds Coliseum: **D-Lo Brown** & **A.J. Styles** beat **Jason Cross** & **C.M. Punk** ... **B.G. James** & **Konnan** beat **The Sandman** & **Sonny Siaki** ... **New Jack** defeated **Slash** in a Hard 10 Tournament match ... **Christopher Daniels** & **Elix Skipper** defeated **Joel** & **Jose Maximo** ... **Kid Kash** defeated **Trinity** ... **Chris Harris** & **Chris Sabin** defeated **Justin Credible** & **Jerry Lynn** ... **Glenn Gilberti** pinned **Raven** after **Vince Russo** interfered.
(05-28-03)

—Dan Murphy

NASHVILLE—NWA-TNA pay-per-view at the Fairgrounds Coliseum: **Paul London** won a four-way elimination match over **Jason Cross**, **C.M. Punk**, and **Kid Romeo** to earn a shot at the X title ... **Justin Credible**, **Red**, & **Slash** beat NWA tag team champions **Christopher Daniels** & **Elix Skipper** in a non-title handicap match ... **Mike Sanders** defeated **Brian Lee** in a Hard 10 Tournament match ... **Don Harris** & **Ron Killings** beat **New Jack** & **Shark Boy** ... **David Young** & **Tracy** defeated **Kid Kash** & **Trinity** ... **Chris Harris** & **James Storm** beat **D-Lo Brown** & **A.J. Styles** ... **The Sandman** wrestled **Sonny Siaki** to a no-contest in a "Clockwork Orange House Of Fun" match.
(05-21-03)

—Frank Miller

EAST RIDGE—UEW at the Terry Gordy Memorial Building: **Dru D. Lite** beat **The Viper** ... **Kenny Arden** defeated **Iron Man** ... **Rage** beat **Chuckie Chuck** and **Rocky Spurlock** in a three-way match ... **Jerry Anderson** & **Jason Hampton** beat **Andrew Alexander** & **Jason Deville** ... **Bull Buchanan** beat **Rush** by disqualification.
(06-14-03)

—Austin Pullin

ERWIN—Southern States Wrestling at the Old High School: **Justin Sensation** beat **Shawn Spencer** ... **Ray Idol** beat **Mike Cooper** ... **Jimmy Golden** beat **Super Destroyer** ... **Robbie Cassidy** pinned **Thorn** ... **Brian Overbay** beat TV champion **Beau James** by disqualification ... **Justin Sensation** & **Ray Idol** beat **Mike Cooper** & **Shawn Spencer**.
(06-14-03)

—Fay Ferguson

ROCKWOOD—Premiere Wrestling Alliance at the National Guard Armory: **Robbie Race** pinned **Menace** to become the new PWA heavyweight champion ... **Shane Williams** pinned **Rich Kavana** in a retirement challenge ... **The Phoenix Foundation** defeated **Shawn Shultz** & **Loco** ... **Jason Maxx** won the Extreme Rumble to become the first-ever Ironman champion.
(06-14-03)

—Dave Lyons

HUNTSVILLE—Southern Wrestling Alliance at the Scott High School: **Sienna Blaze** pinned **Fantasy** ... **Skull** pinned **Simon Bane** ... **Paul Buchannan** pinned **Eric Adamz** ... TV champion **Rage** pinned **C.J. Summers** ... Women's champion **Tiffany Monroe** pinned **Sienna Blaze** ... **Johnny Graham** defeated U.S. champion **The Diamond Studd** by disqualification ... Tag team champions **Gabe Casteel** & **Flex** wrestled **Bad Medicine** & **The Franchise** to a no-contest.
(06-07-03)

—Frank Miller

TEXAS

CORPUS CHRISTI—WWE at the Memorial Coliseum: **The Basham Brothers** beat **Rikishi** & **Spanky** ... **Orlando Jordan** pinned **Crash Holly** ... **The Big Show** & **John Cena** defeated **Chris Benoit** & **Rhyno** ... **Billy Gunn** defeated **A-Train** by disqualification ... **Kurt Angle**, **Brock Lesnar**, & **The Undertaker** beat **Chuck Palumbo**, **Nunzio**, **A-Train**, & **Johnny Stamboli** in a handicap match ... Cruiserweight champion **Rey Misterio Jr.** defeated **Ultimo Dragon**, **Matt Hardy**, and **Jamie Noble** in a four-way match ... **Sean O'Haire** defeated **Bill DeMott** ... **Gail Kim** pinned **Dawn Marie** (**Funaki** was the guest referee) ... Smackdown tag team champions **Eddie Guerrero** & **Tajiri** beat **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas**.
(06-16-03)

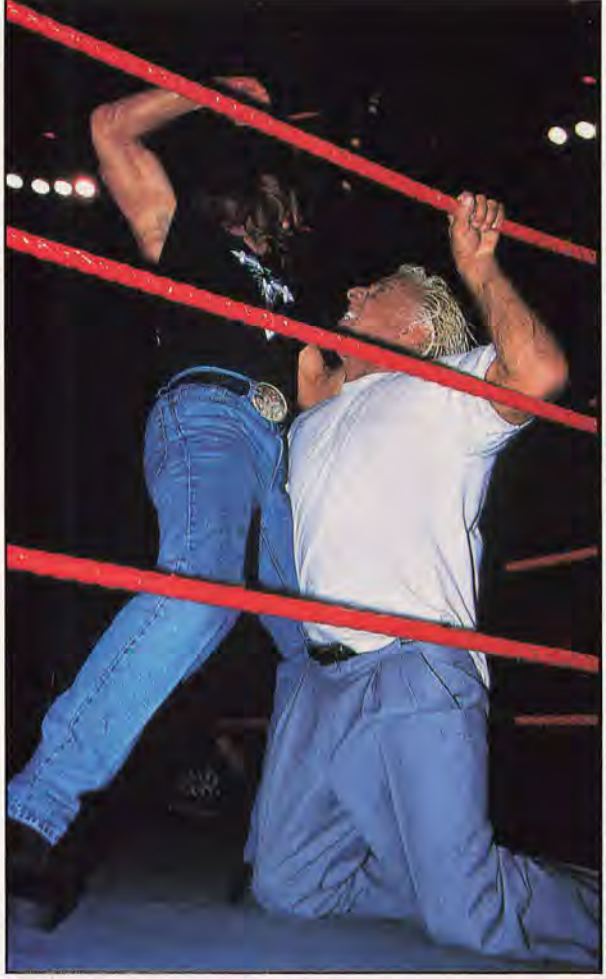
—Natalie Burke

HOUSTON—WWE Bad Blood pay-per-view at the Compaq Center: **Rodney Mack** & **Christopher Nowinski** beat **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** ... **Scott Steiner** pinned **Test** to win the managerial services of **Stacy Keibler** ... **Booker T** beat Intercontinental champion **Christian** by disqualification ... **Rene Dupree** & **Sylvan Grenier** beat Raw tag team champions **Kane** & **Rob Van Dam** to win the title ... **Bill Goldberg** pinned **Chris Jericho** ... **Ric Flair** pinned **Shawn Michaels** after **Randy Orton** interfered ... Raw champion **Triple-H** pinned **Kevin Nash** in a "Hell In A Cell" match (**Mick Foley** was the guest referee).
(06-15-03)

—Will Welsh

LUBBOCK—WWE at the Municipal Coliseum: **The Basham Brothers** defeated **Rikishi** & **Spanky** ... **Orlando Jordan** defeated **Crash Holly** ... **The Big Show** & **John Cena** beat **Chris**

Ivory certainly had Jazz figured out this spring. Too bad for her she didn't seem to have Victoria quite as well-scouted.



Shawn Michaels and Ric Flair weren't scheduled for matches on this edition of *Raw,* but that didn't stop them from tussling in a very violent way after the Randy Orton-Hurricane bout.

Benoit & **Rhyno** ... **Bill DeMott** beat **Sean O'Haire** ... **Kurt Angle**, **Brock Lesnar**, & **The Undertaker** beat **Chuck Palumbo**, **Nunzio**, & **Johnny Stamboli** ... Cruiserweight champion **Rey Misterio Jr.** beat **Jamie Noble**, **Matt Hardy**, and **Ultimo Dragon** in a four-way match ... **Billy Gunn** pinned **A-Train** ... **Gail Kim** defeated **Dawn Marie** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Eddie Guerrero** & **Tajiri** defeated **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas**.
(06-15-03)

—Kara Winters

ARLINGTON—Professional Championship Wrestling at the PCW Arena: **Chris Stevens** beat **Brett Barnes** by submission ...**C-Diddy** defeated light heavyweight champion **Steve DeMarco** by countout ... **Gabe Roach** beat **Adrian** by submission ... **Mike Foxx** & **Shadow** beat **Jared Steele** & **Chris Stevens** ... **Gabe Roach** pinned **Newman**.
(06-14-03)

—Rob Moore

ARLINGTON—Professional Championship Wrestling at the PCW Arena: **Drago** & **Chucky** beat **Cedric Crain** & **Scott Putski** by countout ... **C-Diddy** beat **Tim Storm** by countout in an anything-goes match ... **Melvin** pinned **Don Coby** ... **Gabe Roach** pinned **Eddie Atlas** ... **Jeromy Sage** beat heavyweight champion **Shadow** by disqualification ... **Gabe Roach** pinned heavyweight champion **Shadow** to win the title.
(05-31-03)

—Rob Moore

ODESSA—WWE at the Ector County Coliseum: **The Basham Brothers** beat **Rikishi** & **Spanky** ... **Funaki** defeated **Orlando Jordan** ... **The Big Show** & **John Cena** beat **Chris Benoit** & **Rhyno** ... **Sean O'Haire** pinned **Bill DeMott** ... **Kurt Angle**, **Brock Lesnar**, & **The Undertaker** beat **Chuck Palumbo**, **Johnny Stamboli**, & **Nunzio** ... Cruiserweight champion **Rey Misterio Jr.** beat **Matt Hardy**, **Jamie Noble**, and **Ultimo Dragon** in a four-way match ... **Billy Gunn** pinned **A-Train** ... **Gail Kim** defeated **Dawn Marie** (**Funaki** was the guest referee) ... Smackdown tag team champions **Eddie Guerrero** & **Tajiri** beat **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas**.
(06-14-03)

—Chris Langa

DENTON—Xtreme Championship Wrestling at the XCW Arena: **Pendragon** beat **Bull** in a singapore cane match ... **Seth Shai** beat **Mike Thunder** in a match where falls count anywhere, no disqualification, and the win must be by pinfall, submission or first blood ... **John Allen** pinned **Epi The Phat Samoan** to win the XCW TV title ... **Kit Carson** & **Khris Germany** beat **Scott Phoenix** & **Drunk Adam** in a hardcore match to retain the XCW tag team title ... **Krusher Kong** beat **Hellraiser Hark** to win the XCW heavyweight title.
(06-13-03)

—Rob Moore

DENTON—Xtreme Championship Wrestling at the XCW Arena: **Bull** pinned **Cyclone** ... **John Allen** pinned **Aldo Nova** ... **Bull** pinned **Seth Shai** ... **Scott Phoenix** & **Drunk Adam** beat **Kit Carson** & **Krusher Kong** ... Heavyweight champion **Hellraiser Hark** pinned **Chuey Lopez**.
(05-30-03)

—Rob Moore

LAREDO—WWE at the Entertainment Center: **Spanky** defeated **Shannon Moore** ... **Billy Gunn** beat **Sean O'Haire** ... **Nidia** pinned **Torrie Wilson** ... Smackdown champion **Brock Lesnar** pinned **John Cena** ... **The Basham Brothers** defeated **Funaki** & **Kanyon** ... **Chuck Palumbo**, **Nunzio**, & **Johnny Stamboli** beat **Orlando Jordan**, **Hugh Morrus**, & **Rikishi** ... Cruiserweight champion **Rey Misterio Jr.** beat **Matt Hardy** and **Jamie Noble** in a three-way match ... **Rhyno** pinned **A-Train** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Eddie Guerrero** & **Tajiri** beat **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas**.
(06-08-03)

—Paul Hernandez

AUSTIN—WWE at the Frank Erwin Center: **John Cena** pinned **Rikishi** ... **Bill DeMott** & **Rhyno** defeated **A-Train** & **Crash Holly** ... **Jamie Noble** defeated **Orlando Jordan** ... Cruiserweight champion **Rey Misterio Jr.** defeated **Matt Hardy** and **Spanky** in a three-way match ... Smackdown tag team champions **Eddie Guerrero** & **Tajiri** defeated **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** ... **The Basham Brothers** beat **Funaki** & **Kanyon** ... **Sean O'Haire** pinned **Billy Gunn** ... **Nidia** pinned **Torrie Wilson** ... **Brock Lesnar** & **The Undertaker** beat **Chuck Palumbo**, **Nunzio**, & **Johnny Stamboli** in a handicap match.
(06-07-03)

—Jan Robertson

BROWNSVILLE—International Wrestling Federation at the IWF Arena: **Phantom Lord Spiro** defeated **Golden King** ... **Mad Dog Johnson** defeated **Renegade** by disqualification ... IWF heavyweight champ **Eddie Perez** defeated **Dusty Wolfe** ... **Showtime Summers** defeated **Phantom Lord Slayer** ... **Showtime Summers** defeated **Eddie Perez** in a Russian chain match ... **Phantom Lords** defeated tag champs **Ragin' Renegades** to regain the title in a hardcore rules match ... **Dusty Wolfe** and **Mad Dog Johnson** battled to a no-contest.
(06-03-03)

—Mando Sanchez Jr.

VIRGINIA

PRESTON—KYDA Pro Wrestling at the KYDA Pro Arena: **Johnny Elliott** pinned **Prince Malik** ... Heavyweight champion **Snatch Haggis** defeated **Ranger** ... **Duce** defeated **Shorty Smalls** by disqualification ... **Shane MacIntire** defeated **John Bodey** ... **Jimmy Z** defeated **Chucky Wynn** in a boxing match ... **Tai** defeated **Moe the Maniac**.
(06-01-03)

—Marty Fly

ROANOKE—National Independent Championship Wrestling at Breckinridge School: **Xsiris** defeated **Kamakazi Kid** ... **Nicole Starr** beat **Tone-UP** by countout ... **Knight Stalker** pinned **Midnight Mauler** ... **Frank Savage** won a three-way match against **Chief Blackfoot** and **Mark Jobberson** ... **Eddie Bruiser** defeated **Doc Cool** ... **The Unknown Soldier** & **Dustin Daniels** defeated **The Fugitives** ... Heavyweight champion **Ken Steel** defeated **Tone-Up**.
(05-24-03)

—Robert Amos

WISCONSIN

LADYSMITH—National Federation of Wrestling at Cedar Lodge: **The Huckster** beat **El Vato** ... **Malice** beat **Venom** ... **Cameron Steel** and **Trey Steel** beat **Ace Spade** and **Mike Rollins** ... **J-Real** beat **Shinobi** to win the cruiserweight title ... **Havoc** beat **The Dark Wolf** ... **LaPean The Dream** beat **Rayge** ... **Suicidal Youth** beat **Major Chaos** ... **Red Lightning** beat **Dysfunction** ... **Dave Rose** beat **Anicrusix** to win the Hardocore title ... **Josh James** beat **A.J. Broni** ... **Dinn T. More** and **Mad Wolverine** fought to a draw ... **Boogieman** beat **Jezrial** ... **Dinn T. More** won a battle royal ... **Tiny Tubbs** beat **Mike Geuke** ... **Darkchild** beat heavyweight champion **Steve Stardom** to win the title in a ladder match.
(06-01-03)

—Nicholas Loken

INTERNATIONAL

AUSTRALIA

MELBOURNE—World Wrestling All-Stars at Vidaphone Arena: **Devon Storm** beat **Mark**

Mercedes ... **Teo** won a three-way midget match over **Puppet** and **Meatball** ... **Rick Steiner** beat **Joe E. Legend** ... Cruiserweight champion **Jerry Lynn** defeated **Frankie Kazarian**, **Chris Sabin**, and **Johnny Swinger** in a four-way match ... **Shane Douglas** defeated **Sabu** ... Heavyweight champion **Sting** beat **Glenn Gilberti**.
(05-23-03)

—Dominick Valenti

SYDNEY—World Wrestling All-Stars at the Entertainment Centre: ***Tournament for the vacant cruiserweight title, semifinal matches:*** **Chris Sabin** defeated **Frankie Kazarian** ... **Jerry Lynn** defeated **Johnny Swinger** ... ***Final:*** Lynn pinned Sabin to win the title ... ***Non-tournament matches:*** **Konnan** pinned **Disco Inferno** ... **Teo** defeated **Puppet** and **Meatballs** in a three-way midget match ... **Crowbar** beat **Mark Mercedes** ... **Sabu** defeated **Joe E. Legend** ... Heavyweight champion **Sting** beat **Shane Douglas** and **Rick Steiner** in a three-way match when he pinned Douglas.
(05-21-03)

—Jason Conlan

ENGLAND

NEWCASTLE—WWE Insurrextion pay-per-view at Newcastle Telewest Arena: ***In matches not shown on the pay-per-view:*** **Maven** defeated **Christian X** ... **The Hurricane** pinned **Lance Storm** ... ***PPV matches:*** Women's champion **Jazz** defeated **Trish Stratus** ... Intercontinental champion **Christian** defeated **Booker T** ... Raw tag team champions **Kane** & **Rob Van Dam** defeated **Rene Dupree** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... **Goldust** pinned **Rico** ... **Buh Buh Ray**, **D-Von**, & **Spike Dudley** defeated **Rodney Mack**, **Christopher Nowinski**, & **Theodore Long** ... **Scott Steiner** pinned **Test** ... Raw champion **Triple-H** pinned **Kevin Nash** in a streetfight.
(06-07-03)

—William Cooper

NOTTINGHAM—WWE at the Nottingham Arena: **The Hurricane** pinned **Lance Storm** ... **Maven** beat **Al Snow** ... **Goldust** pinned **Rico** ... **Test** pinned **Val Venis** ... **Rodney Mack** & **Christopher Nowinski** beat **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** ... Intercontinental champion **Christian** defeated **Booker T** ... Raw tag team champions **Kane** & **Rob Van Dam** beat **Rene Dupree** & **Sylvan Grenier** ... Women's champion **Jazz** defeated **Trish Stratus** and **Victoria** in a three-way match ... **Kevin Nash** & **Scott Steiner** beat **Triple-H** & **Chris Jericho**.
(06-06-03)

—William Cooper

MINEHEAD—All Star Promotions at Butlins Minehead: **2 Xtream Dean** beat **The Brooklyn Brawler** (not the former WWE wrestler) ... **Mike Davis** pinned **Five Star Flash** ... **Robbie Brookside** beat **American Dragon** ... **Robbie Brookside** won a 12-man Royal Rumble-style match.
(06-03-03)

—John Stallard

DROITWICH—ESEW at the Leisure Centre: **Baba Barizza** pinned **Chris Carrs** ... **D. Struction** defeated **M.T.X.** ... **Sam Daniels** beat **Kid Kandy** ... **Jonny the Body** & **Shawn Harrigan** defeated **The Coalminers** ... **Kearon Mistry** pinned **Ashley Steel** to win the U.K. title ... **Chris Cage** & **Sam Daniels** beat tag team champions **The Faction** to win the title.
(05-31-03)

—John Stallard

CANADA

PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE, MANITOBA—Premier Championship Wrestling at Sociables Night Club; **Pete Chee** defeated **Sugar Daddy Dixon** ... **Mike Hammer** pinned **Greg Romijn** ... **Kenny Omega** defeated **Chris Raine** ... **Shane Madison** beat **Ronnie Attitude** ... **Chi Chi Cruz** defeated **Shawn Houston** ... **Mike Hammer** won a 12-man battle royal.
(06-08-03)

—Marty Goldstein

NEW ZEALAND

AUCKLAND—World Wrestling All-Stars: The Reckoning pay-per-view taping at the North Shore Event Centre: **Rick Steiner** pinned **Mark Mercedes** ... **Teo** beat **Puppet** and **Meatball** in a three-way hardcore midget match ... **Devon Storm** pinned **Konnan** in a hardcore match ... **Sabu** pinned **Joe E. Legend** ... NWA-TNA X champion **Chris Sabin** beat WWA cruiserweight champion **Jerry Lynn**, **Frankie Kazarian**, and **Johnny Swinger** to unify the two titles ... NWA heavyweight champion **Jeff Jarrett** beat WWA heavyweight champion **Sting** to unify the two titles.
(05-25-03)

—Liz Hunter

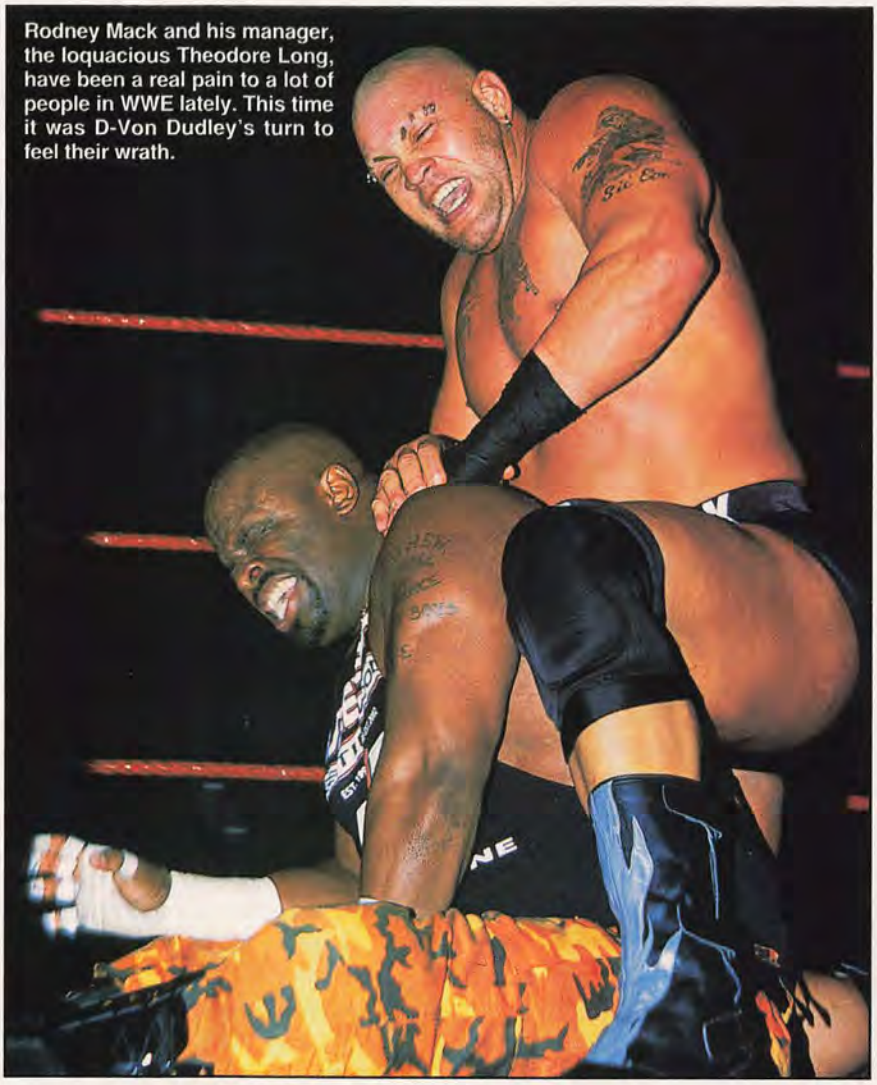
PUERTO RICO

ISABELA—International Wrestling Association at Jose Abrgu Coliseum: **Noriega** beat **Stefano** .. . **Assad** beat **Anarchy** ... **Craven** beat junior heavyweight champion **Tommy Diablo** in a non-title match ... Tag team champions **Miguelito Perez** & **Slash Venom** beat **Victor the Bodyguard** & **Noriega** ... **Apolo** beat **Hurricane Castillo** ... Hardcore champion **Ricky Banderas** beat Intercontenal champion **Chicano** in a extreme rules match (only Banderas' title was on the line) ... **Savio Vega** & **Super Fenix** beat **Ray Gonzales** & **Glamour Boy Shane**.
(06-14-03)

—Alexander Arce

AGUADILLA—International Wrestling Association at Luis T. Diaz Coliseum: **Anarchy** pinned **Sadyst** ... **Tommy Diablo** & **Stefano** beat **Super Mark** & **Damien** ... Intercontineal champion **Chicano** beat **Slash Venom** by disqualification when **Hurricane Castillo** interfeared ... **Noriega** & **Abverila** beat **Paparazzi** in a handicap match ... **Victor The Bodyguard** & **Erinque Cruz** beat **Total Destruction** ... **Shane** pinned **Miguel Perez Jr** ... Hardcore champion **Ricky Banderas** beat **Abyss** in a extreme rules match to retain the title ... **Rey Gonzalez** & **Apolo** defeated **Savio Vega** & **Hurricane Castillo**.
(06-01-03)

—Alexander Arce

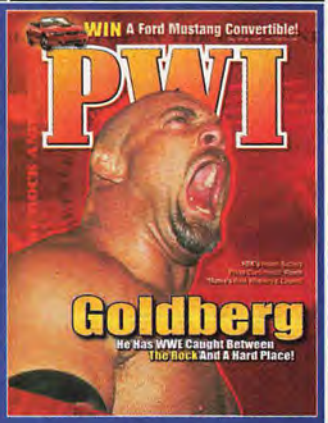


Rodney Mack and his manager, the loquacious Theodore Long, have been a real pain to a lot of people in WWE lately. This time it was D-Von Dudley's turn to feel their wrath.

between falls

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED welcomes readers' comments on any of our stories or columns. Send letters to: BETWEEN FALLS Box 1148, Ft. Washington, PA 19034 Or you can e-mail your comments to prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com Letters preceded by a ☎ indicate letters left by fans on the *PWI* Hotline (1-900-226-4PWI; see ad elsewhere in this issue).

WWE IN A HARD PLACE



Two months after Frank Krewda wrote "Why Goldberg Has WWE Caught Between The Rock And A Hard Place" for our August 2003 issue, that cover story now seems more relevant than ever. The latest sentiment from WWE is that Goldberg is not worth the money or the hassle, leading CEO Linda McMahon to describe his run as "disappointing" in a recent conference call with investors. Our readers, too, seem to have strong opinions about him.

"For all the money he has made in the business, Goldberg is probably the least appreciate of any wrestler out there," stated Stanley Duce of New York City. "If he has such a low opinion of WWE, I don't believe he has a much higher opinion of its fans."

Edna Holly of Los Angeles disagreed. "I've never seen *PWI* do such a hatchet job on a wrestler. Goldberg works hard at being a role model and standing up for his principles. Anyone who has read Krewda's columns knows he doesn't like Goldberg."

"You can tell that WWE is pulling back his push dramatically," noted Andy Diamond of New Haven, Connecticut. "He's getting nowhere near a match with Triple-H for the Raw title. Goldberg is making the `Lex Express' seem like a well-oiled machine."

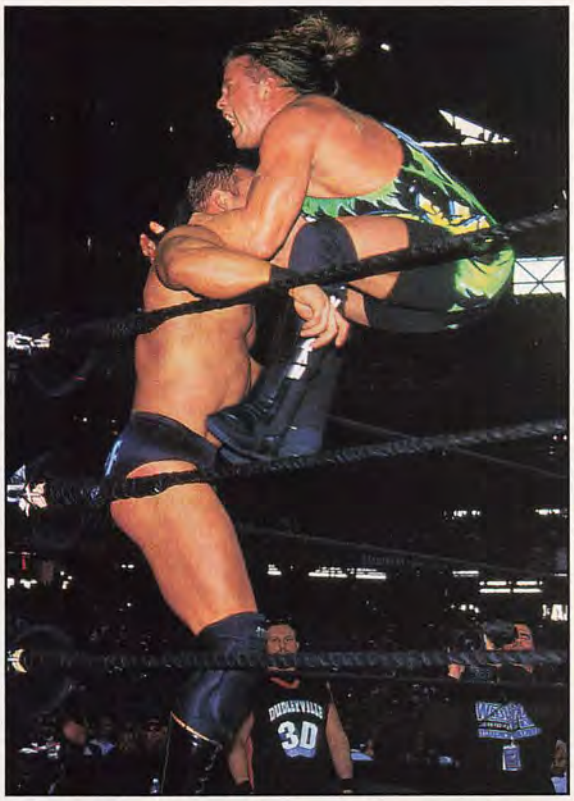
RVD = Y2J?

The more I look at Rob Van Dam and his current position in WWE, the more I find myself comparing him to Chris Jericho and his position three years ago. Jericho's charisma and solid workrate made him one of the most popular wrestlers in WWE, just as Van Dam is today. Both men were successful in ECW and Japan, and entered WWE with great fanfare, only to be held down within a few weeks. Opponents criticized Jericho for being too sloppy, too reckless, and too stiff.

Those are the same complaints against Van Dam. Nowadays, though, Chris Jericho is one of the most valuable wrestlers in the company.

What does all this mean? I am convinced that one day Van Dam will be every bit as important to WWE as Jericho. Y2J's elevation to the top tier certainly didn't happen overnight. But now Jericho is having arguably the best run of his career. The higher-ups are testing RVD just as they once tested Y2J. Jericho passed the test, and I'm sure Van Dam will, too. All we have to do is wait.

DAVID SOBCZAK
psobczak@triadleadership.com



Rob Van Dam should take heart. According to reader David Sobczak, his career is on the same path Chris Jericho's was after a similar amount of time in WWE.

GIVE OL' J.R. A BREAK

I just finished reading "Good Ol' J.R. Bashing" in the September 2003 edition of "Between Falls." I agree with the two readers who said it was mighty confusing when Jim Ross suddenly became Steve Austin's friend again, despite his outspoken criticism of his walkout in June 2002. Then again, it's just as weird that the same fans who bashed Austin for quitting also praised his comeback in February 2003.

I don't understand why everyone is so quick to point out the mistakes of people like Ross and Austin just because they're on TV. In reality, most fans have probably been just as hypocritical as J.R. and Austin at some point in their lives. J.R. and Austin are living their dreams, and it just happens to take place in front of millions of people every week. They have been through a lot together, so we shouldn't judge them so harshly.

ZAK HACKETT
zakhackett@hotmail.com

WWE IS LIKE KFC

It never really hit me as to why I don't like the WWE brand extension until some-

one said my favorite fried chicken place in Eagle Pass, Texas, was planning to split single drumsticks into two and sell them as separate pieces. There are cases in which two is not better than one.

With two brands, there is no credible world champion. Besides, WWE is denying fans of dream matches that would really help business. Why shouldn't Bill Goldberg, the former phenom, be able to lock horns with Brock Lesnar, the current phenom?

These kinds of stupid decisions are what caused WCW to go out of business. And please don't tell me the brand extension has improved WWE, because the proof is in the ratings.

REY SIFUENTES JR.
Eagle Pass, TX

SMART FAN FIRES BACK

I've been reading PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED since 1984, and this is the first time in 19 years that an issue has me irritated as much as these wrestlers who suggest that fans aren't qualified to criticize how they do their jobs. For instance, Chris Jericho often blasts fans who dare to complain about any of his matches. Because I'm a paying customer who feeds these guys, I have every right to say that a Jericho match "sucks" if I so desire.

It's ironic how Jericho and Lance Storm don't hesitate to put down smart fans. These are the same wrestlers who plaster themselves all over the Internet, the home of the "smart marks," with their commentaries and chat-room discussions. They've revealed a good deal about how wrestling operates behind the scenes, so aren't they responsible for pushing the business in this direction?

On a similar note, why do wrestlers and the WWE creative team get aggravated when fans scream "What?!" during someone's promo? For the money that fans pay to support this industry, you'd think they could yell whatever they want, at who they want, and when they want during a show. There is no wrestling business without the fans. So how about a little respect?

MATHEW PAJVOJA
Cloquet, MN

AN NWA CHAMP WITH STYLE

I want to be among the first to congratulate A.J. Styles on becoming the NWA champion. When NWA-TNA first got started a year ago, it was said that the Jarretts put together the X division with Styles in mind. It is a testament to TNA that is was able to take a former WCW mid-carder toiling in the obscurity of NWA Wildside, and mold that person into a credible NWA champion within a year, at the expense of Jeff Jarrett no less.

But the Jarretts couldn't have done that with just any wrestler. Styles is a man with high moral integrity and deep spiritual beliefs. That hasn't always been obvious from his involvement with Sports Entertainment Xtreme, but it has made him a consistent performer with an incredible work ethic. Congratulations, A.J.!

SNOOPS BROADEN
Holland, MI

PWI Hotline Extra!

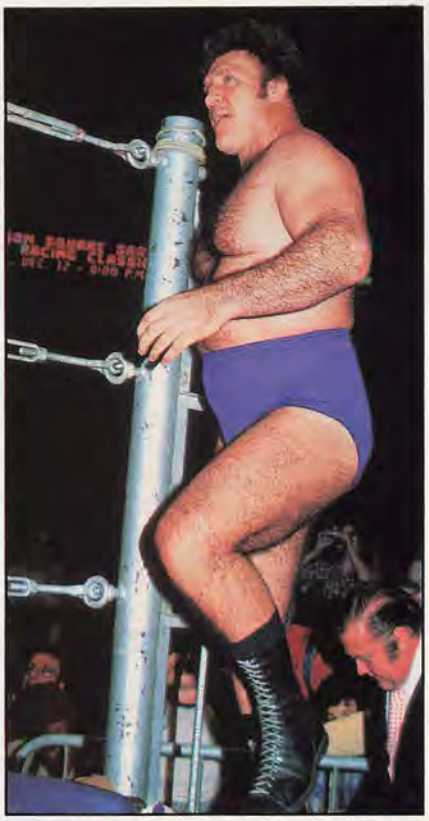
Your answers to our question of the week!

Question of the Week: Given Kevin Nash's inability to regain his traction in WWE, should he retire at this stage of his career? (June 10 to June 16, 2003)

Hotline callers respond: "Nash hasn't lost any traction, because he never had it in the first place," replied Chris Burton of Washington, D.C. "He had the benefit of the WWF hype machine early in his career, and that alone made him a star. He should retire."

Nichelle Penny of Chevy Chase, Maryland, had a different view. "He should get credit for losing weight and looking so good at his age. Nash has worked hard for another run in WWE. As long as he stays injury-free, I don't see any reason for him to end his career."

"WWE already wants Nash to retire," said Reggie Phillips of Teaneck, New Jersey. "He should be ashamed that WWE had to use a special referee, Mick Foley, to save his 'Hell In A Cell' match with Triple-H. He should retire and take care of his nagging injuries."



Bruno Sammartino solidly earned his number-one ranking among WWE champions, notes long-time reader Mike Facciani, who described our 180-page special issue, "Celebrating 40 Years Of WWE" as "fantastic."

"DA BRUNE" WAS DA BEST

Your Summer 2003 special issue, *PWI Presents: Celebrating 40 Years Of WWE,* was fantastic. I've been tuned in to WWE since the old WWWF days of the late-'60s. Without a doubt, I would say that Bruno Sammartino was the greatest champion ever, with Hulk Hogan coming in a close second. Had Hogan concentrated 100 percent on wrestling, instead of taking many extended leaves of absence to make movies and television shows, there's a chance he could have overtaken Bruno.

But, the way things are, the "Living Legend" stands alone at the top of the mountain. Hulk Hogan is the biggest star the business ever produced, but, what Muhammad Ali was to boxing in the'60s and '70s, Bruno was to wrestling. Bruno's marvelous accomplishments in the squared circle will probably never be equaled, and his legend will never be surpassed.

MIKE FACCIANI
Johnstown, PA

PWI official ratings

For period ended June 22, 2003

TOP 10

1. **TRIPLE-H**
   269, Greenwich, CT
   (2) WWE Raw champion
2. **BROCK LESNAR**
   295, Minneapolis, MN
   (1) WWE Smackdown champion
3. **KENTA KOBASHI**
   282, Fukuchiyama, Japan
   (3) GHC heavyweight champion
4. **A.J. STYLES**
   202, Gainesville, GA
   (–) NWA heavyweight champion
5. **THE BIG SHOW**
   485, Aiken, SC
   (7) No. 1 contender: WWE Smackdown title
6. **KEVIN NASH**
   303, Detroit, MI
   (5) No. 1 contender: WWE Raw title
7. **SHINYA HASHIMOTO**
   287, Gifu, Japan
   (10) All-Japan Triple Crown champion
8. **REY MISTERIO JR.**
   163, San Diego, CA
   (–) WWE cruiserweight champion
9. **YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA**
   270, Sapporo, Japan
   (6) IWGP heavyweight champion
10. **BILL GOLDBERG**
    283, Tulsa, OK
    (–) No. 2 contender: WWE Raw title

Rey Misterio Jr.

TAG TEAMS

1. **EDDIE GUERRERO & TAJIRI**
   Combined weight: 436 pounds
   (3) WWE Smackdown tag team champions
2. **RENE DUPREE & SYLVAN GRENIER**
   Combined weight: 504 pounds
   (–) WWE Raw tag team champions
3. **MASA CHONO & HIROYOSHI TENZAN**
   Combined weight: 505 pounds
   (2) IWGP International tag team champions
4. **SHELTON BENJAMIN & CHARLIE HAAS**
   Combined weight: 510 pounds
   (6) No. 1 contenders: WWE Smackdown tag title
5. **CHRISTOPHER DANIELS & ELIX SKIPPER**
   Combined weight: 417 pounds
   (5) NWA tag team champions
6. **KANE & ROB VAN DAM**
   Combined weight: 563 pounds
   (1) No. 1 contenders: WWE Raw tag title
7. **TAMON HONDA & KENTA KOBASHI**
   Combined weight: 547 pounds
   (–) GHC tag team champions
8. **RODNEY MACK & CHRISTOPHER NOWINSKI**
   Combined weight: 476 pounds
   (–) No. 2 contenders: WWE Raw tag title
9. **CHRIS HARRIS & JAMES STORM**
   Combined weight: 516 pounds
   (–) No. 1 contenders: NWA tag title
10. **KEIJI MUTO & ARASHI**
    Combined weight: 471 pounds
    (–) All-Japan International tag team champions

WWE RAW

Raw Champion:
TRIPLE-H
(C) 269, Greenwich, CT

1—**KEVIN NASH** *(1) 303, Detroit, MI*
2—**BILL GOLDBERG** *(4) 283, Tulsa, OK*
3—**CHRISTIAN** *(2) 225, Toronto, Ontario*
4—**KANE** *(–) 326, St. Louis, MO*
5—**BOOKER T** *(3) 250, Houston, TX*
6—**CHRIS JERICHO** *(5) 225, Winnipeg, Manitoba*
7—**SCOTT STEINER** *(7) 275, Detroit, MI*
8—**RANDY ORTON** *(–) 265, St. Louis, MO*
9—**RIC FLAIR** *(–) 243, Charlotte, NC*
10—**TEST** *(–) 282, Toronto, Ontario*

WWE SMACKDOWN

Smackdown Champion:
BROCK LESNAR
(C) 295, Minneapolis, MN

1—**THE BIG SHOW** *(1) 485, Aiken, SC*
2—**REY MISTERIO JR.** *(7) 163, San Diego, CA*
3—**JOHN CENA** *(2) 260, Los Angeles, CA*
4—**THE UNDERTAKER** *(–) 304, Dallas, TX*
5—**KURT ANGLE** *(–) 233, Pittsburgh, PA*
6—**CHRIS BENOIT** *(3) 224, Edmonton, Alberta*
7—**RHYNO** *(5) 275, Detroit, MI*
8—**MATT HARDY** *(4) 220, Cameron, NC*
9—**SEAN O'HAIRE** *(8) 270, Hilton Head, SC*
10—**BILLY GUNN** *(–) 268, Austin, TX*

OVW

OVW Champion:
DOUG BASHAM
(C) 241, Louisville, KY

1—**DAMAJA** *(2) 251, Seymour, IN*
2—**NICK DINSMORE** *(1) 226, Jefferson, IN*
3—**ROB CONWAY** *(5) 240, Pittsburgh, PA*
4—**JOHNNY JETER** *(3) 218, San Diego, CA*
5—**NOVA** *(6) 214, Bricktown, NJ*
6—**MATT MORGAN** *(4) 330, Fairfield, CT*
7—**MARK MAGNUS** *(–) 231, Syracuse, NY*
8—**MARK HENRY** *(–) 372, Austin, TX*
9—**KANYON** *(–) 245, Queens, NY*
10—**JOHNNY SPADE** *(–) 215, Louisville, KY*

RING OF HONOR

ROH Champion:
SAMOA JOE
(C) 270, American Samoa

1—**PAUL LONDON** *(3) 201, Austin, TX*
2—**CHRISTOPHER DANIELS** *(2) 210, Los Angeles, CA*
3—**HOMICIDE** *(1) 220, Brooklyn, NY*
4—**MATT STRYKER** *(10) 220, Cincinnati, OH*
5—**A.J. STYLES** *(6) 202, Gainesville, GA*
6—**DANNY MAFF** *(–) 245, Brooklyn, NY*
7—**C.M. PUNK** *(5) 220, Chicago, IL*
8—**TOM CARTER** *(–) 204, Babylon, NY*
9—**RAVEN** *(7) 243, Short Hills, NJ*
10—**RED** *(9) 147, Brooklyn, NY*

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue. while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue.

ALL ACCESS WRESTLING: Champion—A.J. Styles; **1**—Kevin Northcutt; **2**—Elix Skipper; **3**—Sonny Siaki; **4**—Malice; **5**—Joe Kane; **6**—Jerry Lynn; **7**—Brique St. Pierre; **8**—David Young; **9**—Hotshot Cassidy; **10**—Jacey North.

BORDER CITY WRESTLING: Champion—D-Lo Brown; **1**—Chris Sabin; **2**—Eric Young; **3**—Johnny Swinger; **4**—Sabu; **5**—Dyson Pryce; **6**—Joe E. Legend; **7**—Derek Wylde; **8**—Bobby Rude; **9**—Larry Destiny; **10**—Kyle Rice.

BRUISER WRESTLING FEDERATION: Champion—Fulmer Burks; **1**—Billy Gibbs; **2**—Frank Parker; **3**—Bruiser Graham; **4**—Jimmy Valiant; **5**—Outlaw Lover; **6**—Shawn Christian; **7**—Chris Collins; **8**—Ric Kelly; **9**—Kamikaze Kid; **10**—Caleb Hickney.

CENTRAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Tommy Green; **1**—Jad Lungini; **2**—Terry Alan; **3**—J.T. Money; **4**—Cujo; **5**—Larry D; **6**—Syxe; **7**—Mongoose; **8**—Bo Johnson; **9**—Maddawg; **10**—Diamond.

CHAMPIONSHIP PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Johnny Graham; **1**—Masked Superstar; **2**—Doug Delicious; **3**—Shane Shadows; **4**—John Balsamo; **5**—Jimmy Valiant; **6**—Switchblade; **7**—Brock Singleton; **8**—Larry Zbyszko; **9**—Brian Johnson; **10**—Mercury Flash.

CHIKARA: Champion—Hallowicked; **1**—Mike Quackenbush; **2**—Blind Rage; **3**—Icarus; **4**—Jigsaw; **5**—Gran Akuma; **6**—Eddie Kingston; **7**—Jack Marciano; **8**—UltraMantis; **9**—Mister ZERO; **10**—Reckless Youth.

INTERNATIONAL WRESTLING CARTEL: Champion—Jimmy Vegas; **1**—Colt Cabana; **2**—Dennis Gregory; **3**—T. Rantula; **4**—Sterling James Keenan; **5**—Dean Radford; **6**—Matt Stryker; **7**—Shirley Doe; **8**—Al B. Damm; **9**—Bubba the Bulldog; **10**—Raven.

IPW HARDCORE WRESTLING: Champion—Billy Fives; **1**—Lex Lovett; **2**—Scoot Andrews; **3**—Rod Steel; **4**—Gangrel; **5**—Agent Steele; **6**—Punisher; **7**—Danny Doring; **8**—Norman Smiley; **9**—Mike Sullivan; **10**—Navy Seal.

NATIONAL WRESTLING LEAGUE: Champion—Aidiean; **1**—John Rambo; **2**—Samu; **3**—Flex Fenom; **4**—Jake Davis; **5**—King Kong Bundy; **6**—The Patriot; **7**—Morgus the Maniac; **8**—Kevin Featherstone; **9**—The Freak; **10**—Fumar.

RHODE ISLAND WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Danger Boy Alfredo; **1**—Wolverine; **2**—Danny Cama; **3**—Danny Boy O'Callahan; **4**—Mael; **5**—Johnny T; **6**—Sonny D; **7**—Derek Greenlee; **8**—Lord Davios; **9**—Bill Thomas; **10**—Romie McFarland.

TRANS WORLD WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Skeeter McCoy; **1**—Tom Brandi; **2**—Jerry Lawler; **3**—D-Lo Brown; **4**—Demolition Ax; **5**—Johnny Graham; **6**—Saboth; **7**—Hacksaw Duggan; **8**—J-Money; **9**—Dave Patera; **10**—Shane Shadows.

WORLD XTREME WRESTLING: Champion—Afa Jr.; **1**—Slyk Wagner Brown; **2**—Billy Dream; **3**—Gene Snisky; **4**—Malachi; **5**—Samu; **6**—Black Pearl; **7**—Boogalou; **8**—Mana the Polynesian Warrior; **9**—Crazy Ivan; **10**—Damian Adams.

NWA

NWA Champion:
A.J. STYLES
(-) 202, Gainesville, GA

1—HOTSTUFF HERNANDEZ
(1) 280, Houston, TX
2—RICKY MURDOCH
(2) 261, Houston, TX
3—JEFF JARRETT
(C) 230, Nashville, TN
4—SHINYA HASHIMOTO
(4) 287, Gifu, Japan
5—JOHNNY MOSS
(6) 240, Egremont, England
6—ZACK MERCURY
(8) 255, Lac du Bonnet, Manitoba
7—BILLY FIVES
(9) 222, Cherokee, NC
8—RAVEN
(-) 243, Short Hills, NJ
9—KEVIN NORTHCUTT
(10) 348, Chalmette, LA
10—SPYDER
(-) 225, New York, NY

NWA-TNA

NWA Champion:
A.J. STYLES
(-) 202, Gainesville, GA

1—CHRIS SABIN
(1) 207, Hell, MI
2—JEFF JARRETT
(C) 230, Nashville, TN
3—RAVEN
(3) 243, Short Hills, NJ
4—JUSTIN CREDIBLE
(-) 227, Waterbury, CT
5—D-LO BROWN
(-) 281, Chicago, IL
6—JERRY LYNN
(5) 216, Minneapolis, MN
7—KID KASH
(7) 202, Johnson City, TN
8—GLENN GILBERTI
(2) 234, Brooklyn, NY
9—DAVID YOUNG
(10) 246, Memphis, TN
10—FRANKIE KAZARIAN
(-) 220, Yucca Valley, CA

JAPAN

1—KENTA KOBASHI
(1) 282, Fukuchiyama, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion
2—SHINYA HASHIMOTO
(3) 287, Gifu, Japan
All-Japan Triple Crown champion
3—YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA
(2) 270, Sapporo, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion
4—YUJI NAGATA
(8) 228, Tokyo, Japan
5—KEIJI MUTO
(4) 245, Yamanashi, Japan
6—KENDO KA SHIN
(10) 195, Tokyo, Japan
7—TIGER MASK IV
(9) 170, Uruyasu, Japan
8—GENICHIRO TENRYU
(-) 235, Tokyo, Japan
9—MASA CHONO
(5) 235, Tokyo, Japan
10—MITSUHARU MISAWA
(6) 228, Ashikaga, Japan

MEXICO

1—SHOCKER
(7) 185, Guadalajara, Mexico
2—EL HIJO DEL SANTO
(10) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico
3—MR. NIEBLA
(1) 185, Cualtitlan, Mexico
4—HECTOR GARZA
(2) 220, Monterrey, Mexico
5—UNIVERSO DOS MIL
(9) 240, Mexico City, Mexico
6—DR. WAGNER JR.
(4) 215, Mexico City, Mexico
7—VAMPIRO
(-) 220, Thunder Bay, Ontario
8—BLACK TIGER
(-) 193, Mexico City, Mexico
9—LATIN LOVER
(6) 190, Monterrey, Mexico
10—ULTIMO GUERRERO
(-) 173, Mexico City, Mexico

ratings analysis

Every month, this column will tell fans how we go about rating over 200 wrestlers in 22 different categories. It is a behind-the-scenes look at the most important–and respected–ratings system in the sport. This column is vital reading for all wrestling fans.

Big behemoths battle back! Who says the era of the super heavyweight is long over? Our ratings indicate that isn't necessarily the case. WWE Smackdown champion **Brock Lesnar**, a pretty big man, is ranked second in our overall Top 10, but seven-footers **The Big Show** and **Kevin Nash** are only three and four spots behind him, respectively. We know you'll probably argue (as Senior Writer **Will Welsh** did in his "Ringside" column on page 12) that Nash likely won't remain in the upper echelon of Raw much longer, but we'd counter that by asserting that another big man might be ready to supplant him: **Kane**.

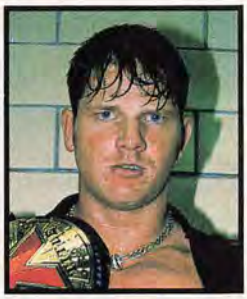
The Big Show

We won't get into an in-depth analysis of **Vince McMahon's** history of favoring and pushing big men here, but we feel compelled to point out that it isn't *always* a bad thing to push athletes with size in this sport. Sometimes they do, in fact, deliver strong in-ring performances.

Although Big Show has been a favorite whipping boy of critics in recent years, he has stepped up his game during the most recent chapter of his feud with Lesnar. He'll never have the blinding speed or the agility of **Rey Misterio Jr.**, but his matches with Lesnar, we must admit, have been dramatic and fun to watch. He seems more inspired than he has been in years. Maybe Lesnar deserves *some* of the credit for that, and maybe big Brock has improved to a point at which he can bring out the best in certain opponents who otherwise struggle. But to not give a lot of the credit for these improvements to Show himself would be wrong. He has earned his spot in our Top 10 for sure, and we can tell you that he will be making a big jump in this year's *"PWI* 500."

Kane is also starting to show a lot of the same kind of fire (no pun intended) that he showed at the height of his popularity. It appears his days of teaming with **Rob Van Dam** are all but over (probably a good development in both of their careers), and he could be ready to challenge for the Raw championship again. Let us hope so, because if **Bill Goldberg** (or perhaps **Mick Foley**) can't unseat **Triple-H** as Raw champion, there aren't many viable challengers left on that brand's roster. In any case, we wouldn't be stunned to see "The Big Red Machine" back in the Top 10 in our next issue.

Stylin' all over the country ... **Jeff Jarrett** was certainly a logical choice to hold the NWA heavyweight title during the TNA era. After all, as a minority owner of NWA-TNA, he wasn't much of a threat to walk out on the company or jump to WWE if offered the opportunity. And he was the biggest name wrestler on the roster full-time from day one. But in part because he was so involved with the business side of TNA, he wasn't exactly a fighting NWA champ during his seven-month reign.



A.J. Styles

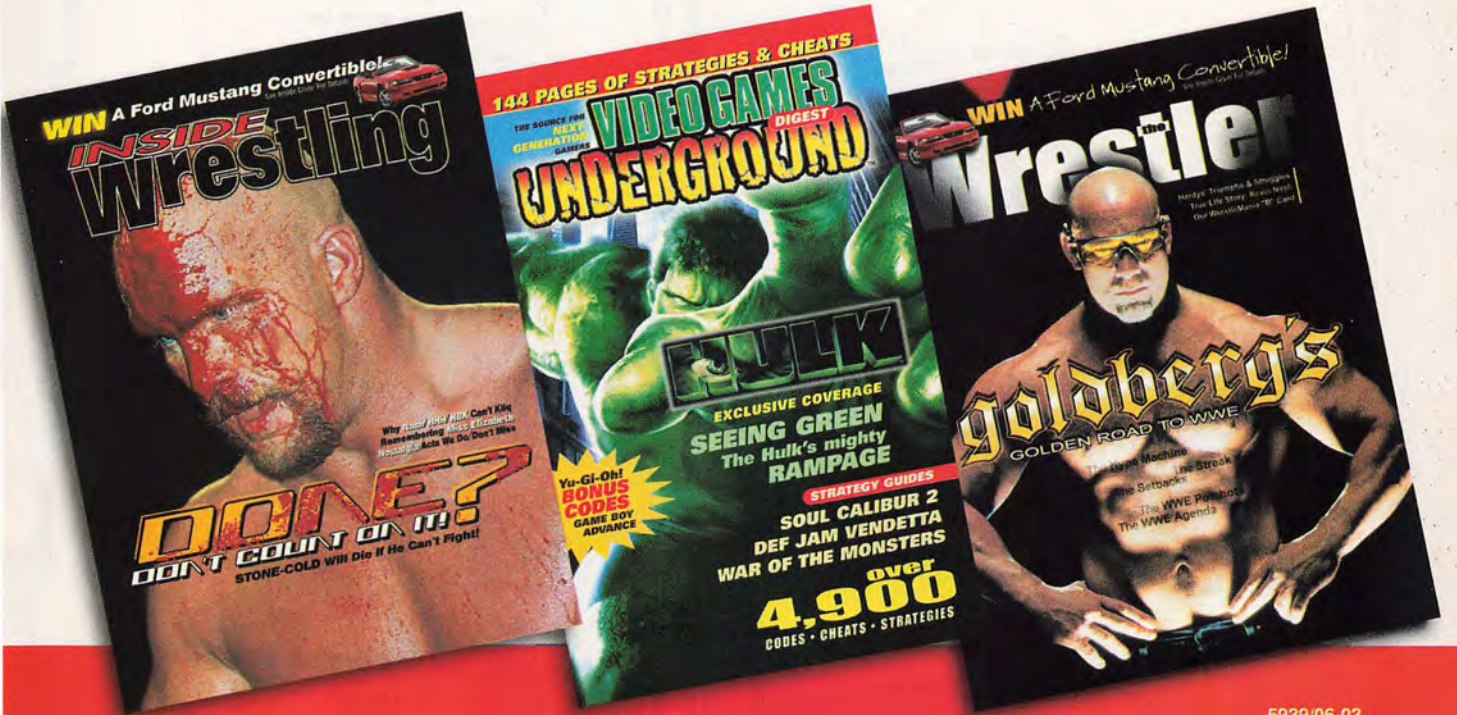
Jarrett occasionally stepped into the ring on other independent shows or during those brief overseas World Wrestling All-Stars tours, but when you consider that he only defended the title on roughly one of every four TNA shows, that doesn't add up to a lot of defenses.

Enter **A.J. Styles** to change all that. He might not yet have the name recognition of Jarrett, but he should be a much more visible NWA champ (he beat Jarrett to win the gold on June 11). We think he has done more than enough to earn his number-four spot in our Top 10 in this issue, and if you look a little more closely at the ratings on the previous two pages, you'll notice his name appearing quite a bit. It's there in the Top 10 ... atop the NWA rankings ... atop the NWA-TNA rankings ... at number five in the Ring of Honor rankings ... and atop the All Access Wrestling rankings in the smaller print. And he and **Red** were considered for a spot in the tag team rankings as the ROH champions.

That's a whole lot of A.J. Styles! And if he carries the NWA belt with him (and defends it from time to time, if allowed) to these shows and to shows in other promotions both in the U.S. and abroad, that's more exposure for a title in need of a little more exposure. So maybe we should all lay off **Vince Russo** for attacking Jarrett and allowing Styles to pin him for the title. In this case at least, it appears the ends justified the means.

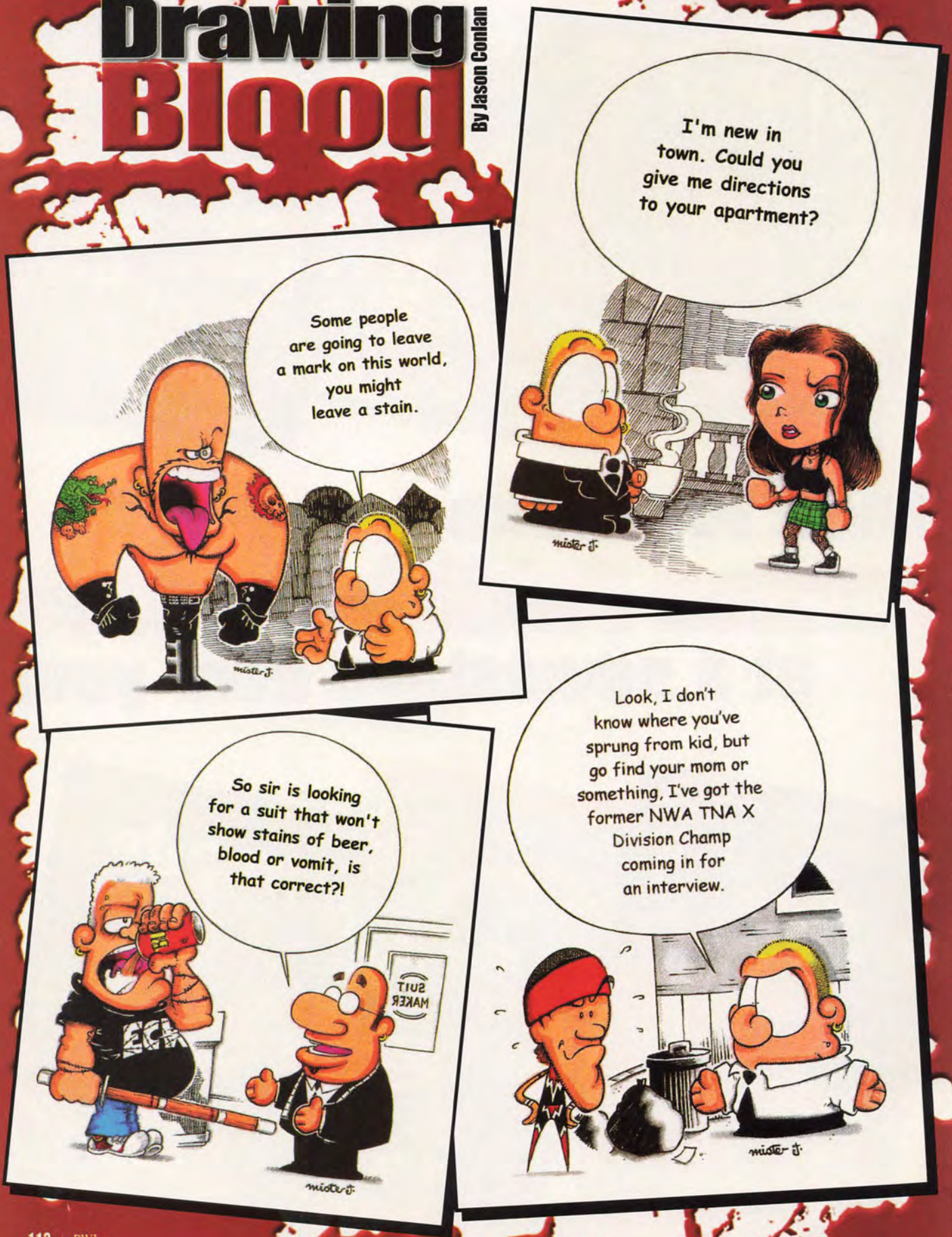
That's it for this issue! As always, if you have any questions or comments regarding our ratings or what you see here, we want to hear from you. Write to: "Ratings Analysis," c/o *PWI*, Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. □

Look for these London Publishing titles at a newsstand near you!



Drawing Blood

By Jason Conlan


I'm new in town. Could you give me directions to your apartment?
mister J.
Some people are going to leave a mark on this world, you might leave a stain.
mister J.
Look, I don't know where you've sprung from kid, but go find your mom or something, I've got the former NWA TNA X Division Champ coming in for an interview.
mister J.
So sir is looking for a suit that won't show stains of beer, blood or vomit, is that correct?!
SUIT MAKER
mister J.

To enter sweepstakes, complete and return the entry/order form to address printed on entry/order form. Or print your name, address and e-mail address (optional) on a postcard and mail to: Sweepstakes, P.O. Box 2021, Marion, OH 43306-8121. Entries must be received by 1/16/04.

Super Million Dollar X Sweepstakes & Prize Fantasy Sweepstakes

OFFICIAL RULES

NO PURCHASE, PAYMENT, SALES PRESENTATION, OR CONTRIBUTION NECESSARY TO ENTER OR WIN. A PURCHASE WILL NOT IMPROVE YOUR CHANCES OF WINNING. Sweepstakes begins 10/1/02. Entry must be received by date specified elsewhere in offer or by prize deadline(s) below, whichever is sooner. Follow all entry instructions published elsewhere in this offer.

SUPER MILLION DOLLAR X SWEEPSTAKES

Winner will be determined by comparing individual sweepstakes numbers on all eligible entries received with the pre-selected winning number. Selection of winning number will be conducted under the supervision of an independent auditing firm and an independent judging organization whose decisions are final. If the winning number is returned, winner notification will be made on or about 4/30/04. IF WINNING NUMBER IS NOT RETURNED, PRIZE WILL NOT BE AWARDED. Sweepstakes open to legal U.S. residents (except residents of Florida and Texas), and to residents of Canada and other countries where offered and permitted by law. Void in Florida, Texas and where prohibited by law.

CONSUMER DISCLOSURES: You have not yet won. No purchase necessary. One prize of $1,000,000, if claimed, will be awarded as an annuity of 30 installments of $33,333.34, or winner may choose $475,000 lump sum cash instead of annuity. Current value of annuity as of 08/12/02 was $475,000. Odds of winning are 1 in 120 million. Sweepstakes registered by Ventura Associates, Inc., 1040 6th Ave., NY, NY 10018 & may be presented in different creative presentations by different organizations. Sweepstakes ends 1/16/04.

Illegible, incomplete, mutilated or mechanically reproduced entry forms or entry forms that have been tampered with or not obtained through legitimate channels will be disqualified. Liability for an irregular entry form will be limited to replacement with another. If, due to a printing, production or other error, more than one valid entry form with the pre-selected winning number is returned, a random drawing will be conducted from among all eligible entries received with the pre-selected winning number to determine one winner.

SCA, Ventura Associates and any of the Sweepstakes Presenters are not liable for payment of any prize to entrants who have violated these official rules.

For the name of the winner, available after 7/30/04 (if prize is claimed), send self-addressed, stamped envelope by 5/31/04 to: Super Million X Winner, P. O. Box 5772, Ellenton, FL 34222-5007.

PRIZE FANTASY SWEEPSTAKES

Winner(s) of prizes below will be selected from among all eligible entries received in random drawings conducted on or about 5/31/04 by Ventura Associates, Inc., whose decisions are final. All prizes guaranteed to be awarded. Sweepstakes open to legal U.S. residents and to residents of Canada & other countries where offered & permitted by law. Void where prohibited by law. For a list of major winners, available after 7/30/04, send self-addressed, stamped envelope by 5/31/04 to: "Prize Fantasy Sweepstakes" Winners, PO Box 5383, Ellenton, FL 34222-5003.

PRIZE FANTASY GRAND PRIZE GIVEAWAY CONSUMER DISCLOSURES: You have not yet won. No purchase necessary. Grand Prize winner chooses from a variety of merchandise with approximately the same value (e.g., automobiles, vacations, electronics, etc.) Approximate retail value (ARV) of merchandise: up to $27,000 or $25,000 cash option. Estimated odds of winning: 1:6,900,000. To choose automobile, winner must be a licensed driver and assume all responsibility for registration, title, license, taxes, insurance fees and any other options not expressly included. Sweepstakes registered by Ventura Associates, Inc., 1040 6th Ave., NY, NY 10018 & may be presented in different creative presentations by different organizations. Sweepstakes ends 1/16/04.

PRIZE FANTASY GIVEAWAY CONSUMER DISCLOSURES: You have not yet won. No purchase necessary. Prize levels First through Third will offer a variety of merchandise, electronics, jewelry, housewares, etc. These winners only may select cash or any prize offered at level won. Values at a given level will be approximately the same. ARV of merchandise prizes & estimated odds of winning: 1 First Prize (ARV: $2,000): 1: 6,900,000; 1 Second Prize (ARV: $1,000): 1:6,900,000; 50 Third Prizes (ARV: $100 each): 1: 138,000; 1,000 Fourth Prizes – 35mm Camera (ARV: $65 each, no cash option): 1:6,900. Total ARV: $73,000. Sweepstakes registered by Ventura Associates, Inc. 1040 6th Ave., NY, NY 10018 & may be presented in different creative presentations by different organizations. Sweepstakes ends 1/16/04.

BONUS/EARLY BIRD GIVEAWAY CONSUMER DISCLOSURES: You have not yet won. No purchase necessary. SuperClubs Breezes Curaçao vacation for two prize includes 7 days/6 nights hotel accommodations, all meals, all land & water sports activities with equipment & instruction, airport transfers & hotel taxes & gratuities; round trip coach airfare on Air Jamaica from U.S. gateway city nearest winner's home. ARV: $5,100, depending on location of winner & fares at time of departure. Any expenses not specified herein are winner's responsibility. Estimated odds of winning: 1:6,900,000. Sweepstakes registered by Ventura Associates, Inc., 1040 6th Ave., NY, NY 10018 & may be presented in different creative presentations by different organizations. Sweepstakes ends 1/16/04.

FOR ANY TRAVEL PRIZE: Travel companion(s) required to sign liability release. Dates subject to availability; travel must be completed within 12 months of award. Restrictions & blackout dates apply. If trip won by an eligible minor, s/he must be accompanied by parent or legal guardian.

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Any winner will be notified in writing within 2 weeks of selection. Winner may be required (at judges' discretion) to sign & return an Affidavit of Eligibility/Liability Release, & where legally permissible, a Publicity Release within 14 days of date on notification. Acceptance of a prize by a minor will require execution by parent or legal guardian of required documentation. Costs for goods or services not specified are winner's responsibility. No substitution of prizes except by Sponsor due to unavailability. Except where prohibited by law, winners consent to use of their names, hometowns, prizes won & likenesses for promotional purposes on behalf of all presenters without additional compensation. Void where prohibited by law. All federal, state, provincial & local laws & regulations apply. Prize values in U. S. currency. No transfer or assignment of prize permitted. Winners responsible for all taxes on prizes. U.S. laws govern all aspects of this sweepstakes.

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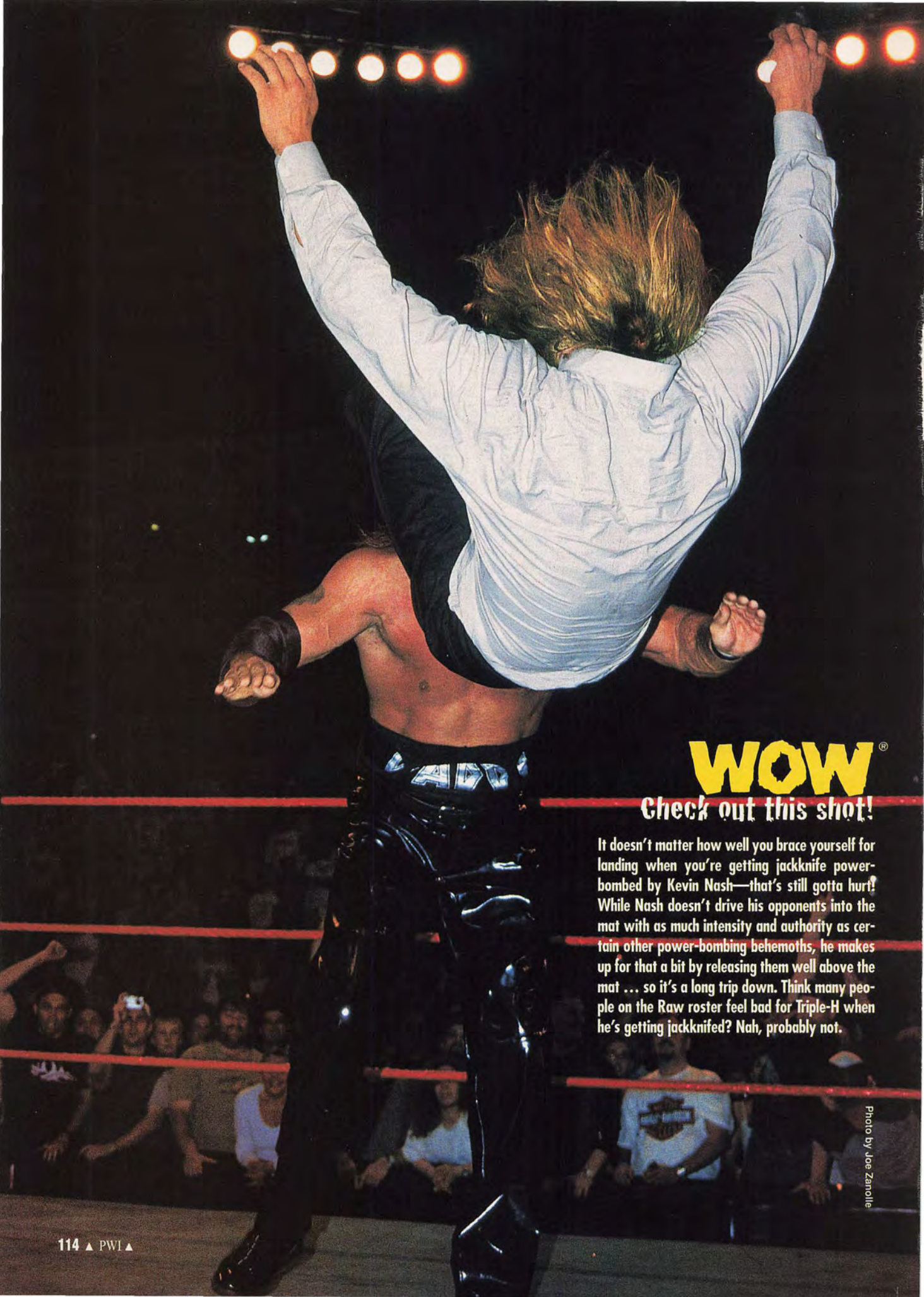

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It doesn't matter how well you brace yourself for landing when you're getting jackknife powerbombed by Kevin Nash—that's still gotta hurt! While Nash doesn't drive his opponents into the mat with as much intensity and authority as certain other power-bombing behemoths, he makes up for that a bit by releasing them well above the mat … so it's a long trip down. Think many people on the Raw roster feel bad for Triple-H when he's getting jackknifed? Nah, probably not.

Photo by Joe Zanolle

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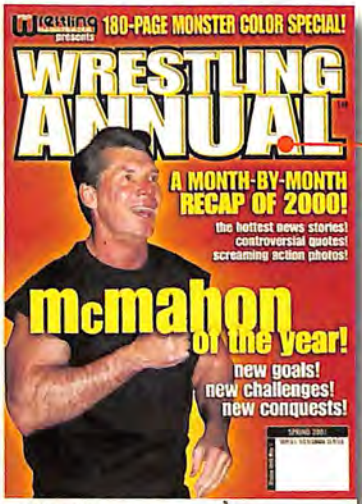

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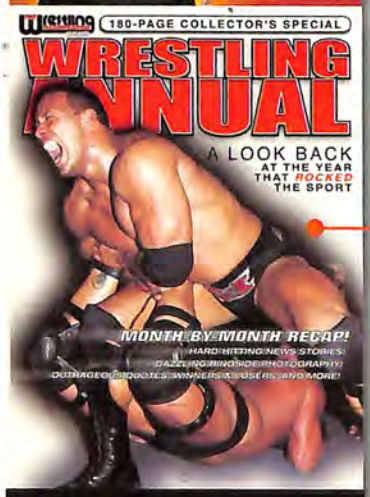

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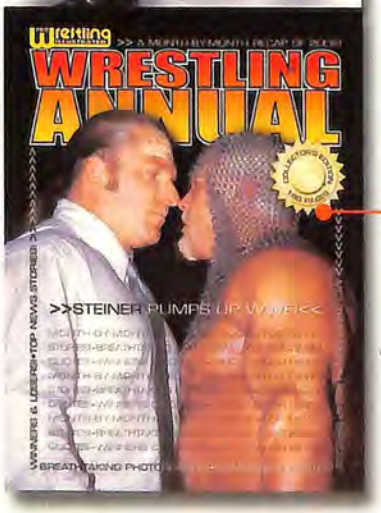

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